

# The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

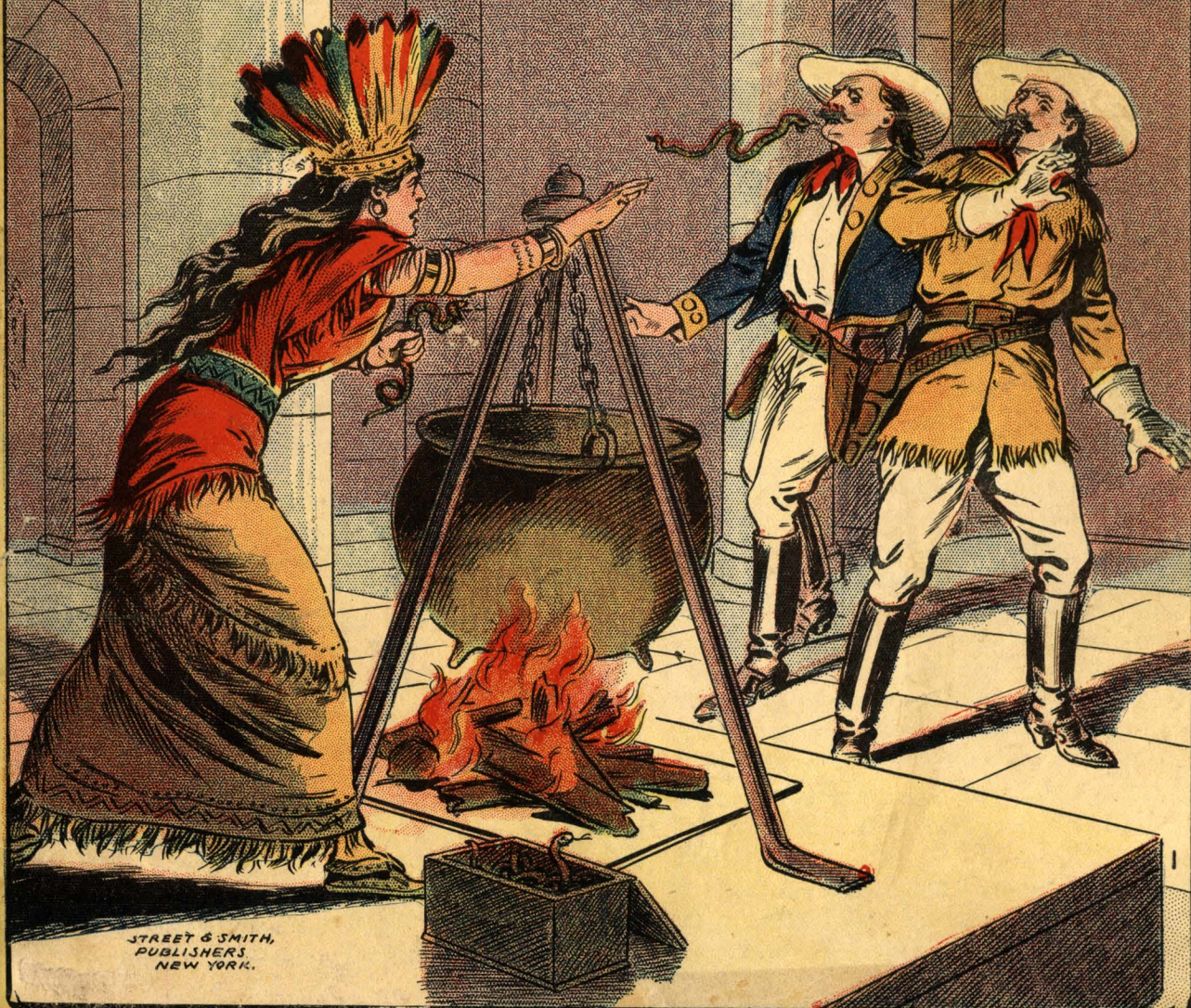
Devoted To Far West Life



BUFFALO BILL'S  
WITCHCRAFT

OR PAWNEE BILL AND THE  
SNAKE AZTECS

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"BUFFALO BILL"



STREET & SMITH,  
PUBLISHERS,  
NEW YORK.

Plucking a serpent from the box, she hurled it at them. "Back!" she cried.  
"How dare you invade the temple of mysteries."



# THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION **STORIES** DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

*Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y. Copyright, 1911, by STREET & SMITH.*

No. 508.

NEW YORK, February 4, 1911.

Price Five Cents.

## Buffalo Bill's Witchcraft;

OR,

## PAWNEE BILL AND THE SNAKE AZTECS.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

### CHAPTER I.

#### WILD BILL.

When Wild Bill Hickok galloped into the town of Tinijas, word had come that Baron von Schnitzenhauser was in serious trouble there. On the way in he had looked for a dark-cheeked, dark-eyed young woman, Donna Isabel, who had delivered that word, and had not found her.

The pistol king drew rein in front of the leading hotel of the place kept by a man known as Tinijas John. Throwing the reins to a Mexican boy he strode with clinking spurs into the hotel barroom.

His question, to Tinijas John, who was behind the bar, was purposely a bold one:

"Can you tell me if there is a Chink joss house in this town?"

Tinijas John surveyed the man before him; ran his eyes from the clinking silver spurs to the braided velvet jacket, then to the Stetson topping the well-shaped head and long hair. En route, it may be mentioned, he did not fail to note the handsome revolvers on the hips of the stranger, nor the gold-mounted bowie knife in its sheath. In his estimation, Wild Bill, whom he had never met before, was something of a dandy.

But though up to that moment he had never set eyes on Wild Bill, Tinijas John was not caught napping. He knew instinctively that this handsome borderman was one of Buffalo Bill's party.

"Wherever there is a lot of Chinks," he said, "there is likely to be a joss house, to be shore; but I ain't never heard of one here in Tinijas. What made you ask?"

"I'm interested in such things," said Wild Bill, leaning carelessly against the bar. "A Chink is sure a queer animal. As Bret Harte maintained, 'the heathen Chinese is peculiar.' By the way," his eyes flicked round the room, "since I'm here, I'll ask another question: Have you happened to see a butterball of a Dutchman, toddling along on very thin legs? A man in your position bumps up against about every odd sample of humanity that straggles into the town, and if you've ever seen that Dutchman, you couldn't miss remembering it."

A queer look flitted across the face of the hotelkeeper, which was not lost on the keen-eyed man who was watching him.

"I haven't seen your Dutch friend," he declared; yet, as he pulled down a bottle, his hands shook. "What will you have?" he invited.



"Nothing; this is not my day. Just one more inquiry: Tell me how I can reach the Casino?"

Tinijas John shot him another sharp look.

"Turn the corner below, and keep going. You can't miss it. Walk five minutes; then look for a big sign, with the name on it; that'll be it. But it's too early for the show."

Wild Bill threw a coin on the bar.

"To pay you for your trouble," he said, and went out.

"That will stir up the animals," was his thought. "Now for the Casino."

Throwing a glance over his shoulder as he walked on, he saw that Tinijas John had run to the window of the barroom on that side, and was looking out at him.

At the Casino he asked for the manager.

"It's about an actress," he said, when the doorkeeper hesitated.

The manager, an alert young fellow in loud clothes, came down.

"Something I can do for you?" he said.

"Take me up into one of your back rooms," Wild Bill requested. "I'd like to have a talk with you there."

"Something important? You mentioned an actress, I believe?"

"You are shy one actress, I think."

"I am, and it's a queer thing; if you know anything about her, I'm willing to talk with you."

"We'll discuss that in the back room."

Up a stairway the manager led, and conducted Hickok to one of the small wine rooms lying back of the Casino stage. The place, at that hour, was deserted.

"We can talk quiet enough here," remarked the manager, as he flung open a door. "Just step in there."

The room was small, and scantily furnished; it had but a few chairs, some lamps, and a small wine table in the middle of the floor. Wild Bill dropped into one of the chairs.

"Did you see a fat Dutchman come up here a couple of nights ago?" he inquired. "If you did, he's a friend of mine; and he's missing, too, like your actress." He smiled. "Perhaps it's an elopement. The actress I'm thinking about was called Donna Isabel; she is very dark—Spanish and Indian, I believe; I understood she had an act here—dancing and singing."

"She hasn't shown up for two nights," was the answer, "and I don't understand it; she was my best card. About the Dutchman, I haven't seen him."

"He came here, and I have reason to think he dropped out of sight here."

"I'm sure I don't know anything about it. He might have been robbed and slugged. Tinijas is a tough place."

"You haven't been here long?"

"Less than a month. I hire the Casino of Tinijas John, the owner; he's the proprietor of the hotel up the street. But about that woman?"

"She was out in the country, a mile or so from here, and she brought word that the Dutchman, whom she had met here, had got into trouble; it was in one of these small rooms. So," he looked the manager straight in the face, "I thought I'd come right to headquarters and make my inquiries about him. But I can see that you don't know anything."

"Not a thing."

"I believe you; you're honest, but you've fallen in with a bad crowd." Wild Bill cocked an ear at one of the partitions. "I was followed to this point," he said calmly, "and the fellow who followed me is now hiding in the room next to this. He was sent by Tinijas John. I'll bet that I'm right. Will you go me?"

A light step sounded in the adjoining room; Hickok's words had been heard, as he had meant them to be, and the eavesdropper was getting away.

Making a jump, Wild Bill rushed to the door of the room, but found it locked. When he had smashed against it, and broken the lock, he saw that the room was empty; but the spy had gone so hurriedly that he had not been given time to close the door by which he had fled.

"See you later," Wild Bill flung at the astounded manager, and flickered through the second door in hot pursuit.

But when he gained the street below, where he thought the man ought to be seen, no man running was in sight; and the men he did see there showed no such interest as might have been expected if the fleeing rascal had dashed past them.

"Round number one; but I think I drew blood."

Wild Bill backed against a wall, where he quietly lighted a cigar, and began to watch the street.

## CHAPTER II.

### FOLLOWING THE CHINK RAT.

A characteristic quality of Wild Bill Hickok was recklessness. Having undertaken to find the baron, he had gone about it in a manner to bring speedy results, without considering the danger it might toss him into.

Buffalo Bill and his friends had come to Tinijas to run down a band of opium smugglers, with whom Tinijas John was connected. It was a moral certainty that the Chinamen in the place were mixed up in the smuggling. And the baron had been seen last, in an unconscious condition, in one of the wine rooms at the Casino. This news had been brought to Buffalo Bill by the Casino dancing girl, Donna Isabel; her motive being hatred of a man named Granger, who, though sheriff of the county, was one of the smuggler leaders.

The reader will be able to see now why Wild Bill had



made his bold play. Some member of the opium-smuggling gang had fallen afoul of the German. Hence Tinijas John would be sure to put spies at the heels of the man who had come seeking information.

It was Wild Bill's idea to spot the spies, and follow them. This he expected would lead to immediate developments, and perhaps to the baron himself.

At the end of five minutes Wild Bill's watching seemed about to be rewarded. A door opened in a wall on the other side of the street, as if moved by hidden springs, and a blue-bloused Chinaman, appearing suddenly, dived into it and out of sight.

Wild Bill smoked placidly at his cigar, and stared at the door, which remained open.

"Chink spells opium—probably. No, by gorry, in this instance, it spells rat!" His eyes rounded. "And what a rat!"

A rat as big as a flour barrel had come sliding into view behind the wall, went sliding past the open door, and disappeared.

"Now, I can look for a cat; and it ought to be as big as an elephant. If I didn't know better I might think I had 'em, and had 'em bad. If old Nomad was here, he'd call this whiskizos."

As nothing more happened, and the door remained open, Wild Bill concluded to investigate the giant rat.

"This is Chink business, all right," he thought, as he moved toward the door, "and if I follow the Chinks I may get right into the heart of the opium mystery, and strike hands with the baron. There is some sort of hocus-pocus going on back there, and I'd like to know what it is."

On reaching the door and looking through he saw the rat again. He was given a better view of it, and discovered that it was mounted on wheels, with a rope end passing through a ring in its nose, by which it was pulled along. But he did not see the men who were pulling it; the rope reached on into the darkness of a narrow passage, its farther end invisible.

Wild Bill began to follow the rat; but he did not come up with it at once; it began to move more rapidly, as if it knew that it was being pursued.

At length it whisked through a doorway, and was gone, the door whipping into place on swinging hinges behind it.

Pushing the door open, Wild Bill found himself unexpectedly confronted by a peculiar scene. The rat had stopped in the middle of a small room hung round with Chinese curtains and lighted by Chinese lanterns. The scurrying heels of vanishing Chinamen twinkled at the opposite side of the room, and vanished behind one of the curtains. A Chinese drum thumped, like a jumping heart. Then from one side of the room a dragon crawled, with red, distended mouth, advancing upon the rat as if to devour it.

Wild Bill shifted his cigar, rubbed his nose, and scratched his chin.

"No, I ain't dreaming, I'm not suffering from any delirium tremenjus, and I don't believe in whiskizos, even if Nomad does. So, what I am seeing I'm seeing; but, by gorry, it's a funny go! Maybe if little Willy keeps still enough, he will see something worth while. My guess is that this is one of the first acts in a Chinese drama, or perhaps some rite in Chinese freemasonry. Lay on, Macduff!"

But nothing happened.

The dragon had come to a stop close by the rat. It was made of Chinese paper, wonderfully colored. It had been given a push, apparently, strong enough to send it into the centre of the room. But the men who had pushed it did not appear.

When ten minutes had passed, with nothing doing, Wild Bill's curiosity got the better of his discretion. He walked out into the queer room, and up to the big rat and the dragon. Then he saw that the rat had a door in its back, set like the hatch of a ship.

Shifting his cigar again, he regarded the rat curiously.

"In Troy, I believe, a wooden horse came in, and it was filled with enemies. That wasn't Troy, New York, of course; everybody is friendly there! If there is anything in this rat, under that hatch, it may be opium."

He slipped the hasp.

It was as if he had signaled, for the hidden drum boomed, the door in the back of the rat flew open, and a Chinaman, rising like a jack-in-the-box, pitched at the daring white man. At the same moment, doors concealed by the curtained walls flew inward, and a mob of Chinamen were flung into the room pell-mell, and came dashing upon him.

Wild Bill dropped a hand to one of his revolvers as the jack-in-the-box Chinaman clutched at his throat, but he was knocked over, and he and the Chinaman rolled on the floor together.

Under any ordinary conditions Wild Bill Hickok was the equal of any three men that might have been pitted against him, and he could be expected to take care of twice as many Chinamen; but when the Chinamen numbered nearly a score the odds were too great.

He realized this, stopped his resistance, and lay panting on the floor, with Chinamen clinging to him as the Liliputs clung to Gulliver.

"Let up," he growled, not at all pleased with himself. "I'm a fool, and I know it; but, by gorry, you don't need to kill me for it; the world is full of fools, and the fool killer is asleep! Let up!"

Some of them still clung to him—a half dozen in number; the others ringed round him, and shot questions at him in a bewildering sort of pidgin English.

Wild Bill freed himself with a threshing flounce, and backed against the wall, though he had not yet been able



to get on his feet. He discovered that his revolvers and his knife were gone, which was no doubt a good thing, as he might have tried to use them, and certainly that would have brought his death.

"Don't all talk at once," he grumbled. "I can't understand you—see? If there's any one here who can speak decent English, now is his chance to demonstrate it and cover himself with glory."

They ceased their chatter, that they might hear him.

"As I said," he explained, "I'm a fool; nobody knows that better than I do now. I butted in here, where I had no business to come. You were having a bit of Chink freemasonry is my guess; or perhaps something in the line of Chinese drama. It's queer stuff—Chinese drama. That made you mad. I suppose the fellow who was hid in the rat was billed to hop out at the psychological moment and put a few crimps in the tail of the dragon; things like that happen in a Chinese play, I'm told. If so, and I interfered at the wrong moment, I beg your pardon."

"Who you' name?" was shot at him.

The hidden drum thumped, and the Chinese looked at each other; two of them started hastily from the room.

"If I told you my name," said Wild Bill, "you wouldn't know it. When I'm called right, it's J. B. Hickok; but generally it is Wild Bill; sometimes it's the pistol king. But for you, I reckon, any other Bill would sound as sweet."

"Why you come?" was next demanded.

"I've told you already—I came because the fool killer was havin' his noonday siesta; but, to make it plainer, I came because I saw a door open, and that big rat whisk by in a way to make me want to follow it."

"Dool open?"

That apparently startled them; one of them jumped away, as if he went to close it.

"A Chinaman came in here, through that door, from the street out there, and left the door open; then the rat came along, and I followed the rat. Sabe?"

"Me sabe," said the spokesman, but he did not say it kindly.

"So, if it's all the same to you, I'll take my hat, which I see over there, and my weapons, and I'll bid you good-by."

His air was as bland as it could be, after his rough treatment, but he did not get the consent he had asked for, and he had not expected that he would get it.

The hidden drum sounded again.

Wild Bill knew now that it sounded signals. The Chinamen started and looked round, as if this drum-beat astonished them; then, without more ado, they flung themselves on the man before them, and, beating down his resistance by the very force of numbers, they made him a prisoner.

"It began as a farce, and seems to be ending as a

tragedy," Wild Bill grumbled, as he sat crouching against the wall, his hands and feet bound.

He looked into the glaring eyes of the Chinamen, who surrounded him.

Then his nonchalant air returned.

"Oh, it's all right; have your way. I see my cigar over there, burning the tail of your rat; with your permission, if you'll give it to me, I'd like to finish it."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CAPTURE OF DONNA ISABEL.

The thin-faced, white-eyed man stood looking at Donna Isabel. He had entered her room at the hotel kept by Tinijas John, while she was throwing her belongings into a trunk in preparation for leaving the town. His manner was threatening, and when he drew a revolver on her the girl's dark cheeks blanched.

"It won't do you no sort of good to put up a holler," he said brutally. "The winder is down and fastened, and if you should holler, and bring any one, it would only be Tinijas John."

"What do you want?" she gasped.

"That's better," he said, relieved. "I was afeared you'd throw a fit or two, and make trouble for me. Might as well take it cool, you see."

He edged carefully to a chair, and lowered himself into it, keeping her covered with the revolver, while his whitish eyes searched her face.

"But," she stammered, "I—I thought—you were a prisoner."

He coughed out a hard laugh.

"That's what Buffalo Bill thought, and the rest o' that gang; but, y' see, I ain't; not now. They had me, and they had Granger with your help; an' they was already figgerin' us on the way to the Yuma penitentiary; but I reckon we ain't goin' to see it this trip."

"You escaped?" she gasped.

"No, not exactly. They was bringin' us into town. You know how it was; Granger and me, and Wilson, and some more, got trapped, out at the Chink mine, while we was tryin' to trap Cody's crowd. Granger's deal would 'a' gone through all right, too, if't hadn't been for you; and Buffalo Bill's crowd would be now layin' 'out deader'n nails by that mine. You got word to 'em, and they turned the trick on us. It was kinda low-down business on your part."

Her pallor became more pronounced.

"Granger thinks it was, and I reckon he won't forget it. That's why I'm here. But you asked how we got away. Well, some of the boys from the town done it. They jumped in on Cody's gang as we was bein' brought



in, and took us away from 'em. There was a nasty fight; Wilson was killed, and some of Cody's men."

"Who?" she said.

"None o' the main guys, I'm sorry to say. Some of the Chinks they was bringin' along with us was also killed. It was a hot fight while it lasted. The bodies was brought in a while ago, Chinks and all. And to-night, by the light o' the moon, there's goin' to be a high old Chink funeral, out on the hill above the town."

"Where is Granger?" she asked.

"I dunno, but if I did I wouldn't tell you. All you need to know is, that I'm workin' on his orders. You threw him down," he added harshly, "threw down the whole gang, and you can't expect that you won't suffer for it."

She started to rise from her knees by the trunk, where his revolver had held her; but when she saw it pointing straight at her bosom, and caught the wicked gleam of his whitish eyes, her courage failed, and she sank back.

"Better not," he advised.

"Wh-what are you going to do with me?" she gasped.

"Personal," he vouched, "I ain't goin' to do nothin' to hurt ye, if you're willin' to obey orders and keep quiet. Otherwise——"

"Yes?" Her voice choked.

"Otherwise—you git this. I've got my orders. You're to go with me, and keep still."

"And you will take me to Granger."

"Mebbeso, I dunno, but not straight to him, anyhow. First, you're goin' into the Chink prison pen. You know where it is—up behind the idol room."

The chilling fear that swept through her made her teeth chatter.

"Yes, I know," he said, "it skeers you. It's where they put the Chinks they're goin' to bowstring; but you needn't be afraid of that. Granger is goin' to take you back to the Snake Aztecs, and turn you over to them."

The color came back into her face.

"That won't be so bad, eh?" he said, observing her closely. "Well, accordin' to Granger, it'll be a heap sight worse when you git there. Aire you ready to go with me now, without any female high strikes?"

"See here," she said, in a pleading tone, her voice trembling. "This is rather a poor return, don't you think, for the favor I did you?"

He glanced at his left shoulder, and stretched out his left arm; he had difficulty in using the arm.

"It might be," he admitted, "under some conditions."

"Pawnee Bill had captured you," she reminded, "and had you tied hand and foot, in Granger's shanty; and I

cut the cords and let you go free. I think you owe me something for that." \*

"Not now," he grunted. "Y' see, what you done afterward cancels all that; anyway, I got to do w'at the gang says, and you threw the gang down; I ain't responsible for that, and I got to obey orders."

"Does Tinijas John know of this?" she asked.

"Tinijas John?" He snorted. "He knows I'm in this room right now, and he's waitin' to help me, if I tip him the word; but Tinijas, y' see, don't want to show his hand open if he can help it. Tinijas allus works underground; he's the mole gopher of this outfit."

"I suppose I'll have to go with you," she said. "But I'd like to know just what I'm to expect."

His sinister laugh sounded.

"You'll have company. You've seen the critter they call Wild Bill? Well, he's to be with you."

"One of Buffalo Bill's men!"

"Yes, he's goin' along; he's waitin' for you now in that room I mentioned."

His face shriveled into what he considered a merry smile.

"He's one o' these hyer smart guys. You reckon that Buffalo Bill's Dutchman got into trouble; he was captured, accidental, by the Chinamen; and they railroaded him out to the mine, without knowin' it, in a wooden case that I reckon they thought held tea. Not knowin' that, but knowin' from you that the Dutchman was in trouble, Cody fired his friend Wild Bill into Tinijas here, to find out what had happened to the fool. That's where Wild Bill fell down. He got into a room where some of the mystery work of the Chinks was goin' on; and they found him there, and nailed him. And now he is in that room; and he'll make the trip with you. So, as I said, you're goin' to have company."

"Does Buffalo Bill know that?" she queried.

"I dunno; but I think not."

"Because, if he does, it spells trouble for you," she declared, "and for Granger. Granger is a fool if he doesn't see that."

"I reckon not—when we get Wild Bill out where the Snake Aztecs can toy with him; they ain't gentle, you know."

He arose, still clutching the revolver.

"I don't see no use in playin' up to you what ain't so," he said. "The question is now, aire you goin' quiet, or do I have to call in Tinijas John?"

From the tray of her trunk she took a purse, and drew out of it a diamond ring.

"This is yours, Hawkins," she said, "if you'll fall down on this job; it's worth five hundred dollars, and it will bring three hundred in any pawnshop. Take it, and let

\*For a full account of the incidents mentioned and many others, see last week's issue, "Buffalo Bill's Opium Case."



me slip out by the back way; then report to the scoundrels who sent you that I was gone when you got here."

He shifted uneasily, eying the shining ring.

"I couldn't do it," he said, "f'r, y' see, Tinijas knows I'm hyer, an' he knows that you aire hyer; it'd be my finish."

"Then," she added, "take the ring, and let me jump past you; you can fire off your revolver, and miss me, and tell them that I got away."

"I'll look at the ring," he said.

She tossed it to him.

In catching it, he dropped the revolver into his lap, using his right hand, as his left arm was stiff and sore from the wound received when Pawnee Bill flung his knife into it.

The woman made a jump for the door as the revolver was lowered.

But she did not reach it; he thrust out his foot, and she came sprawling to the floor.

"I expected that trick," he snarled, catching up the revolver again. "You lay there quiet, or I'll put a bullet through yer head."

He had the ring now in his left hand, and after eying it thrust it into his pocket.

"I'll jes' keep it," he said.

"You villain!" she screamed at him.

"Compliments like them don't break no bones," he urged. "If cusses could make a man black and blue, I've had enough flung at me by Granger an' others to turn me into a blue nigger; so, y' see, I don't mind."

"You are a villain," she panted, in her impotent fury; "you have no more gratitude than a block of wood, or you would remember the favor I did you."

"Oh, I remembers it," he admitted; "the only trouble is that ain't goin' to do you no good."

He shuffled past her, and made sure that the door was locked.

"If you smash that winder and pitch out into the street," he said, "you'll only break yer fool neck; so you won't try that. Now, hold out yer hands."

"You're going to tie me?" she gasped.

"Frum that break you made, I reckon I got to; I can't afford to take chances. Hold 'em out."

"I refuse," she said. "I'll call for help."

Her scream arose, angry and frightened, but it was stopped by the fingers of the white-eyed man clutching her by the throat.

She fought him tigerishly with her nails, and struggled to free herself. But her strength was not great enough; he forced her against the wall, choked her until she gasped for breath, and while she was half unconscious he slipped cords round her wrists and knotted them with quick dexterity.

Having done that he thrust a handkerchief gag into

her mouth, and fastened it there by tying the ends of the handkerchief behind her head.

She was now almost in a fainting condition, so was rendered helpless.

"Will you walk," he snarled at her, "or have I got to kerry you?"

She mumbled a furious answer.

"Oh, all right, I'll kerry you. And I'll hammer you on the head if you try to kick up a row."

He caught her in his strong arms and staggered out of the room. As he did so a face peeped at him over a banister.

"It's all right, Tinijas," he whispered. "I reckon thar ain't goin' to be no further trouble. You jes' watch fer the B. B. crowd out by the front. They shacked into town an hour ago, b'ilin' over with excitement, and they'll make gun play, if they know what's goin' on. You got to blind 'em, if you can."

The face of Tinijas John slipped back out of sight; his caution was so great that he did not even speak.

## CHAPTER IV.

### BUFFALO BILL'S SEARCH.

On his return to Tinijas, Buffalo Bill's chagrin and irritation were greater than words can fitly express. In the moment of a noteworthy victory he had lost its fruits.

Jim Granger, treacherous sheriff of Conejos County, arrested for being a leader of the opium smugglers, was free again. So was his chief lieutenant, Sim Hawkins, known as White-eyed Hawkins, one of the greatest rascals of the border.

Granger had requested Buffalo Bill to come to his aid in running down the opium smugglers. That had been a blind, to cover up Granger's own wickedness. He had tried to steer the scout's party into a Chinese mining building, or in front of it, where they could be slaughtered; it having been his intention, then, to claim that certain desperado Chinese had done the killing. The plan had been turned against him; he had fallen into his own trap.

But as he and his fellow prisoners were being conveyed to Tinijas, a strong force of his friends had dashed in on horseback, put up a stiff fight, and he and Hawkins had been rescued.

A fearful toll had been paid by the rescuing party; five of their men were dead. Several Chinamen, held as prisoners by Buffalo Bill's party, had also fallen. And Buffalo Bill had lost three men; though fortunately not one of the three were his personal friends.

The king of scouts had two bullet holes through his hat, to remind him of the fight; old Nomad had a "burned" spot on his shoulder, where a bullet had passed;



and Little Cayuse had lost his eagle feather, which was a great grief to him, and gave him a nervous fear of the future. Pawnee Bill had escaped unscratched, and so had Schnitzenhauser.

"It's too bad, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill, "but, you see, though we have lost Granger, we have struck a blow that will halt this opium smuggling. Granger is foot free, and he'll get out of the country, and so will Hawkins, and all that crowd. The bad men of Tinijas will go into hiding. You can bet, necarnis, that the widespread smuggling along this border has been given its knock-out."

"You're kind, Gordon, to want to make it easy for me; I can see how you feel about it," Buffalo Bill answered. "But you're too generous. I ought to have had a stronger force."

"You expected to rely on Granger's force, you know."

"Ah, that is where I blame myself; I relied on Granger too long, and he turned out to be a scoundrel."

"He was the sheriff, and it was his business to direct you; so, if he went wrong, that puts no sort of blame on you," Pawnee Bill urged.

Buffalo Bill smiled.

"You're like Hickok, Gordon, too generous by half, when you come to estimate your friends."

"Speakin' o' Hickok," broke in old Nomad, "I admits thet, sence this hyer ruction, I ain't been easy in my mind. He went inter Tinijas ter see what had happened ter ther baron, and ther baron is hyer wi' us, right side up; and Wild Bill, we don't know whar he is."

"In the town, of course," assured Pawnee Bill.

"In trouble, too, mebbeso; otherwise, et looks like he'd have come back. Thet town is a bald hornets' nest right now, you can bet, 'count o' what has happened; an' whar thar's trouble afoot, yer know Wild Bill Hickok jes' cain't keep outer et."

"Don't worry, old Diamond," said Pawnee Bill. "You can be sure that Wild Bill knows how to take care of himself."

The few prisoners they still held, nearly all Chinamen, were being herd-driven in the trail ahead of them. The dead Chinamen and dead white men had been sent on, strapped to the backs of ponies, with another party. With that party had gone the woman, Donna Isabel. Buffalo Bill and those still with him had delayed at the mine to search it for opium, of which a few cases had been found.

Night was at hand as they entered Tinijas, and it was at once seen that the place was seething with excitement. Granger had many friends; besides, the ramifications of the smuggling fraternity were of unknown extent. A crowd gathered, and made angry demonstrations. But Buffalo Bill's party pushed straight on toward the centre of the town, brushing the angry men aside with scant ceremony.

A Chinese laundry received the bodies of the dead Chinamen, an array of excited Chinks having gathered there for the purpose. The bodies of the white men were turned over to an undertaker.

Buffalo Bill and his companions turned back to Tinijas John's, after surrendering their prisoners to the town authorities. Ostensibly this movement upon Tinijas John's was because it was the best hotel in the town; the real reason was they knew that Tinijas John was one of the smugglers, though no proof on that point was then obtainable, outside of the word of Donna Isabel.

Tinijas John received them courteously; he was too shrewd to do otherwise. And they were given the best rooms and the best service the house afforded.

"Wild Bill Hickok didn't call on you to-day?" Buffalo Bill inquired, as he put his name on the register.

"If he did," said Tinijas John cautiously, matching wits with this keen-brained man, "I didn't know it was him; people comes and goes all the time hyer, to be sure; so he might 'a' drifted in and drifted out again. His name ain't on that register."

Yet something in the words and in the manner of the man informed Buffalo Bill at once that Tinijas John had seen Wild Bill.

After supper Buffalo Bill and his friends went down into the street, which was filled with armed men. Who was friend and who was foe could not be determined.

Baron von Schnitzenhauser, who turned up at the hotel, was now the guide.

"Fairst," he said, "ve vill go py der Casino in."

The performance in the Casino was beginning when they entered it. But instead of seeking seats they followed the baron to the wine rooms at the rear of the house.

"Idt iss here," said the baron, stopping before the door of one of the rooms, "vare I haf der peginnings oof my sdrange inexberiences. I come py dhis room in, mit der vomans; idt iss py her special inwidation; unt she order some vine, vot I haf to bay for. When I trink idt, I tond't know notting afdhervards; unt I vake oop in a Shinese joss house, vot musdt pe somevheres near."

Buffalo Bill sent for the manager of the Casino, and asked if he knew where the joss house was to be found.

"In the other building, across the street," he said. "There is a door in the wall—you can see it from this window; when you get through that you are to look for an underground passage. I've never been there, but I have heard that much. If you can hit on that passage it will lead you to the joss house."

They went down, and found the door, which they forced; but they could not locate the underground passage. Some frightened Chinamen whom they encountered professed entire ignorance of it, and of course lied; but, for the time, Buffalo Bill was baffled. One thing,



however, they learned: the Chinese were making preparations for a hasty burial of their countrymen who had been killed in the fight.

Returning to Tinijas John's, Buffalo Bill inquired for Donna Isabel.

"She's gone," said the proprietor.

"Gone? She arrived here not more than two hours ago," the scout informed him.

"That's right, Cody," said Tinijas John easily, "but she packed her trunk and lit out; I don't know where she went. All I know is that she went up to her room, and I haven't seen her since."

"As there has been no stage out this afternoon, she can't have left the town. I think I'd like a look at that room."

Pawnee Bill went with the scout and Tinijas John upstairs to the room which Tinijas John said had been used by Donna Isabel. It was unoccupied.

"You can see that she ain't here, Cody," said Tinijas John, leading the way in. He threw a glance round the empty room. "She lit out, as I told ye."

"And took her trunk?"

"Sure thing; a wagon came to the hotel door and got it."

Buffalo Bill pulled open the door of the little stove and looked into it. It held a number of cigar stubs and half-burned matches, together with some old envelopes. Fishing some of these out, the scout turned to Tinijas John.

"This envelope bears the name of J. B. Martin," he remarked quietly. "Perhaps Donna Isabel was masquerading as a man; that would account, too, for the cigars smoked here. You can see that the smoking was done to-day."

Tinijas John stared and fell back.

"That's funny," he said; "I didn't know that the woman smoked."

Buffalo Bill cast the things back into the stove.

"I am sure she didn't," he said.

Out of the room they went, with Tinijas John; then into the street, leaving Tinijas John in the barroom.

"That was a lie he told, of course, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill.

"Yes, he took us to the wrong room. The woman may be in the house this minute. But it is Wild Bill that we are searching for."

Though some of the ruffians in the street would have been only too glad of an opportunity to "do up" the scouts, they were afraid to make the tackle openly. They trailed behind, muttering threats, as Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill took their way along.

Old Nomad had been sent to the livery stables, as it had been discovered that Wild Bill's horse was in one of them. After that he was to make a search for the Mexican boy who had brought the horse in.

Little Cayuse had been sent off to watch proceedings at the Chink funerals for which the Chinamen were making such elaborate preparations. So only the baron remained.

"Oof Hickok iss meedting mit der same inexperience dot I dit, he iss in der Chink joss house," he averred. "If I knowed vare idt iss, budt," he finished, with a flourish, "I tond't, so vot iss der usefulness?"

As they could not find Wild Bill, could not locate the Chinese joss house, and had failed to discover Donna Isabel, the trio repaired at length to a side street close by the Chinese part of the town, and remained in waiting, to see what they could see of the Chinese funerals, and get a report from Little Cayuse.

Nomad was still absent, trying to locate the Mexican boy.

## CHAPTER V.

### LITTLE CAYUSE'S DISCOVERY.

Two or three hours later, Little Cayuse appeared before them in a state of bewildered excitement.

They had themselves missed seeing the Chinese funeral cortège wind out of the town in the moonlight for the cemetery hill where the Chinese dead of Tinijas were laid to rest. Nomad had called them away, thinking he was on the trail of the Mexican boy, but he had been mistaken—the boy they found and questioned knew nothing, and they lost much time.

They were in the side street again, with Nomad, where the young Piute had been told to come to them, and he appeared there. He had a new eagle feather in his hair, and his eyes were shining. Also, he had what he considered a startling story.

"Meet um bad Injun," he explained, touching the eagle feather proudly.

"And you took away his eagle feather," said the scout. "He was a bad Indian, because he had an eagle feather and you had none."

"Mebbeso me like um have eagle feather," the Piute admitted.

Then he changed his mind about telling how he got the eagle feather.

"You see um box of dead Chinees?" he demanded.

"The Chinese in their coffins? No, we weren't here when the procession started."

"Me see um."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Up on hill," said Little Cayuse. "You know where um hill is?"

"Yes, where the Chinese cemetery is. You were there?"

"Me foller um Chinees, on caballo. But me no sabe somet'ing."



"There was something about it you didn't understand?"

"Wuh!"

"How was it? Tell us about it."

"What um Pa-e-has-ka say, when box of two go on trail?"

"Say that over again."

Little Cayuse repeated it.

"Two of the coffins were not deposited in graves in the cemetery, but were taken out on the trail?"

"Wuh!"

"What trail?"

Little Cayuse swung his hand in the direction of it.

"On the trail leading south. Well, what happened then?"

"Um buried."

"The two coffins were buried out by the trail?"

"Wuh! One on top. All same cache!" He swung his hand round, as if smoothing down a mound; then stamped his foot on the ground.

"That's plain enough—eh, Gordon? Two of the coffins were taken out along the trail and buried, one on top of the other; then the place was smoothed over, like a cache."

"Thar's shore suthin' quar erbout thet, though," Nomad declared.

The thought that came into the mind of the king of scouts was startling enough to make him giddy.

"It couldn't have been possible——"

"I'll finish et fer ye," said Nomad. "You're thinkin': What if them coffins held Wild Bill and ther young woman? The Chinks wouldn't bury 'em in their own cemetery."

"I won't think that—it's foolish."

"Yet it's a queer thing, necarnis, as Nomad says," declared Pawnee Bill.

"Der kveerest dot I haf heardt yit," said Schnitzenhauser. "Dhis iss a kveer town, unt a Chink iss a kveer pitzness, I pedt you; budt Vildt Pill—himmelblitzer, oof idt couldt have peen him!"

"You saw the two coffins buried there," said Buffalo Bill, turning again to the Piute. "Then what?"

"Me take um caballo and come find Pa-e-has-ka."

"You rode back to report it. You weren't seen by the Chinamen, I hope?"

Little Cayuse shook his head.

"No, Pa-e-has-ka."

"Yer can bet on ther Injun ter make a sneak of et, when et's needed," praised Nomad. "But this makes me oneasier than a boy with tight boots. I'm votin' thet we rack out and investergates. But I ain't goin' ter believe thet Wild Bill has been wiped out."

"Now, about the eagle feather?" said Buffalo Bill.

The Piute touched his head ornament proudly.

"Me see um Injun," he explained; "me not know who

—strange Injun; him no Piute, no Pawnee, no Apache. Injun come up by Chinee; speak by Chinee; then take 'um caballo, and ride pronto."

A satisfied smile crackled across his face.

"Injun have um eagle feather—me no have um eagle feather." He dropped a brown hand to the long lariat of horsehair that hung at his belt. "So—me get um eagle feather."

"Waugh!" gulped Nomad. "Yer don't mean et? Yer pitched yer rope at him, and pulled ther eagle feather right outer his ha'r?"

"Wuh!" The Piute's face cracked in a smile again. "Me rope um eagle-feather."

Buffalo Bill smiled, too.

"Gordon," he remarked, "he seems to have you going; that's a feat which would test even your great skill with the riata."

"Injun think him see whiskizos," explained the young Piute. He doubled over with laughter. "He no see um Piute—no see um Piute caballo; no see anything. No know what it is take um eagle feather; think um mebbeso whiskizos. Wuh!"

"Skeered him inter fits," said Nomad; "and I s'pose he went down thet trail on his hoss like a streak er chain lightning."

"Like um two streaks light'n'; no look back; give um holler." He waved his hands expansively. "Then um gone."

He pulled the eagle feather out of his long black hair and exhibited it.

"Take a look at it," said Pawnee Bill, with a start of surprise. "If you know what tribe that indicates, necarnis, you're ahead of me."

The feather had been dyed; it had a red tip, then a streak of blue, with the botly of the feather black. Pawnee Bill and old Nomad, with the scout, examined it closely by the light of the street lamp.

"Unless it's just an individual notion, that marking tells of a tribe I'm not acquainted with," Buffalo Bill admitted.

"Little Cayuse," he said, "guide us to the place where those two Chinese coffins were buried."

Little Cayuse tucked the feather back in his hair, and ran to get his horse.

The other horses, with Schnitzenhauser's mule, were in a livery stable, near the one in which Wild Bill's animal had been located. Some warning instinct made Buffalo Bill now decide to take it along.

"We can use it as a pack animal, in case of need," he said. "If Hickok is still in the town, and requires another, he can get a horse out of the stable."

"Hickok ain't in the town," grumbled Nomad; "I'm bettin' big money he's in one er them coffins."

But he was voicing his fear, rather than his belief.



## CHAPTER VI.

## A BIT OF MYSTERY.

The full moon was high in the sky when the Piute brought them to the "cache," as he insisted on calling the place where the coffins had been buried by the Chinese.

The double grave, if it was one, had been deftly concealed; first by trampling the earth level with the surface of the ground, then by scattering grass, leaves, and old boughs over the spot in a manner to give it a natural appearance. When these were scraped aside, the fresh soil was revealed.

Old Nomad looked down at the yellow earth with a shiver.

"I don't like et," he admitted. "This hyer ain't no Chink graveyard, an' them two coffins warn't buried hyer without a good reason. Ef et should shore prove thet Wild Bill is under this bit o' ground, I'm plum cert'in ter lose what little sense I've got, an' kill 'steen dozen o' them yaller-bellied Chinamen; I reckon I ain't goin' ter be able ter help et."

Buffalo Bill had no comment to make, as he took the spade that had been brought and gouged it into the earth. The question of what the double grave held had been threshed out in all its bearings on the way. Nothing was left but to find out if any of their many guesses were right.

Buffalo Bill went down rapidly and skillfully; the ground, freshly placed, was light and easily handled, after the first foot of trodden earth had been cast out.

In a little while Pawnee Bill replaced him, insisting on doing his share of the work, and Pawnee Bill was wielding the spade when the point of it touched the first box.

He paused and looked down; the sound of the spade striking the box had been heard by all. After an instant of hesitation he resumed digging.

When the box was uncovered, it was seen that the Piute had not been mistaken in thinking it a Chinese coffin; it was in the shape of the Chinese caskets for the dead, and was covered with Chinese letters.

"I haf heardt oof findting goldt, hid mit a blace like dot," hopefully suggested the baron, down on his knees and looking in. "Idt vouldt pe a goodt vay, to keeb somepodty from obening der grave vot idt iss subbossed to pe. Oddervise, oof I am making anodder guess, der Chineezers haf puried some Chinks here vot haf diedt oof der blague, or der smallbox."

"Waugh! Ther smallpox!" gurgled Nomad, jumping back. "I hadn't considered thet as a likelihood."

"I think," said Pawnee Bill, looking up, "that there has been no smallpox, or other contagion, in the town."

"So far as ve know," added the baron, "budt ve tond't know eferyt'ing, nodd vhen idt is der Chineezers."

Buffalo Bill dropped into the grave alongside, and he and Pawnee Bill hoisted an end of the coffin.

"It seems to be empty," he said, astonished.

"Embty! Dhen idt iss not a goldt gache."

The box was pulled out of the hole.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill came out after it; and Pawnee Bill pried off the lid with the point of the spade.

The box was empty.

"Vot?" gasped the baron, staring down into the box in the moonlight. "Vot iss der meanness oof dot?"

"You tell me, baron," said old Nomad, who was mightily relieved. "But," he added, looking into the "grave," "mebbeso thar's suthin' in ther other box."

Catching the spade out of the hand of Pawnee Bill, he sprang into the hole in his impatience, and began to throw out the dirt, working feverishly. Almost immediately he uncovered the second box.

When the earth had been removed from the top, and the box was drawn out and opened, it, too, was seen to be empty.

"Vot?" the baron howled again. "Vot iss der foolishness oof dhis pitzness?"

"Waal, thet's what I want ter know myself," said Nomad. "Why did ther Chinks take the trouble ter bring two empty boxes out hyer an' bury 'em? Thet is ther work o' crazy men, an' I never yit seen er Chink what was crazy, though I've met up with a few thet was mighty big fools."

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill looked at the empty boxes in puzzled wonder. Little Cayuse was frightened; this had an air of that mystery which always frightened him. He was wishing he had not said anything about the buried boxes. In his fear he toyed with his new eagle feather, wondering if it was not bad medicine, and if he oughtn't throw it away.

"Maype, py shinks," guessed the baron, "somedings iss puriedt under der pokes!"

He let himself down into the hole, called for the spade, and began to gopher away, sinking the hole deeper.

"Idt iss beating my dime," he confessed, when the spade struck ground so hard that he knew he was at the bottom of the excavation. "Here iss a hole, mit two coffins in idt, unt nottings else. Vildt Pill iss nodd here, der missing vomans she iss nodd here, unt der goldt he iss not here; aber I am nodd treaming, I am——"

"Anyhow, baron," Nomad interrupted, "yer ain't seein' things; thar ain't nothin' ter see, except two Chink coffins an' a hole in ther ground. This is makin' me plum crazy."

The baron crawled out of the hole, with Nomad's assistance; he, too, was dazed.

"I can make somedings oof idt—not," he said to Buffalo Bill.

"We are all in the same boat, baron," the king of scouts confessed. "I don't know what it means. It might pay,



though, to set a watch here after we have restored everything to its former condition, and see what happens."

"That's right," Pawnee Bill agreed. "There is a hole in the ladder, of course, though I can't discover it; these coffins weren't brought out here and buried without any reason whatever."

"Yedt I tond't know me apowet dot," avowed the baron, shaking his puzzled head. "A Chink is a kveer pitzness, I pedt you."

"We'll set a watch, and see," said the king of scouts.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE VELVET CLUE.

Leaving Nomad, Little Cayuse, and the baron to fill in the hole and watch beside it, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill returned to the town.

It seemed reasonably certain that if Hickok had not fallen into serious trouble he was still in Tinijas, making a quiet search for the baron; as he did not know that the baron had been found at the Chink mine, where he had been taken as a prisoner, and was now at liberty.

Also, they believed that Granger had made for Tinijas, after his escape, and was in hiding there. Besides, they wanted to locate the woman, who had dropped out of sight in a manner that suggested evil work.

But they made no progress. The streets were not so filled with people. Tinijas John was still behind his bar, silent and crafty. And the Casino performance was in full blast.

They spent the night in their ineffectual search, and returned to the closed-in "grave" shortly after daybreak, where they found Nomad and the German crouched in the bushes, with the horses in concealment some distance off.

"Nothin' doin'," Nomad reported.

"Kvieter as a grafeyard," the baron added; "ve haf vatched der hole der whole nighdt t'rough, unt seen notting. Nomat has peen dot caudious, he vould nodt efen ledt me schmoke mine pipe."

"We discovered nothing in the town," the scout informed them. "Wild Bill has simply dropped out of sight. Where is the Piute?"

"Projeckin' round out along the trail," said Nomad. "He struck out on his caballo soon's it was light ernough ter see. I'm lookin' for him back now any minute. I'm plum worried about Hickok."

While they were getting breakfast, the rat-a-tat of the Piute's pony returning was heard. Little Cayuse came in sight at a dead run.

"Ther critter thinks thet he has snagged onter suthin'," said Nomad, starting up.

When the Piute drew in by them he produced and held

out a small piece of velvet cloth, which they recognized at once.

"Out of Wild Bill's coat," said Buffalo Bill, catching it out of the Piute's hand. "Where did you pick this up, Little Cayuse?"

"By um trail," said the young Indian, his black eyes shining.

"I don't like the look of this, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill gravely, "though I am glad the Piute found it. What do you make of it?"

The bit of velvet was a small, irregular triangle.

"Was it hanging on a bush?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"By um trail," the Piute repeated.

"On the ground, by the trail; then it wasn't torn out by a bush, nor anything like that."

Nomad ran to get his horse, and returned in a minute or so, mounted.

"I'm goin' ter take a look at ther place whar thet was found," he explained. "Mebbeso thar is suthin' more ter be picked up thar."

The others followed him, more slowly, but the Piute accompanied him, to show him where the velvet had been found.

When all had arrived at the spot, Nomad was down in the trail on his hands and knees, inspecting some hoof-prints of ponies.

"Been a wheen of caballos gone along hyer airly las' night," he declared, "toes a-p'intin' toward ther south. Looky hyar."

He indicated the tracks.

Buffalo Bill flung out of his saddle and joined the old trapper.

"You're right," he said.

"An' right hyar is whar ther Piute picked up ther piece o' cloth. Puttin' two an' two tergether, how does et figger out?"

"If Wild Bill was with this party, he must have been a prisoner," said the scout.

"Perhaps he was following them," suggested Pawnee Bill.

Buffalo Bill stood up and looked at his pard.

"Would he have set out on a trail like this, Gordon, without leaving some word for us?"

"It doesn't seem so, does it?" Pawnee Bill admitted. "He would have tried to keep in touch with you. It begins to look as if he was taken along as a prisoner. That would explain why we can't locate him, nor hear from him."

"But who done et?" said Nomad, scratching his grizzled head. "War et ther Chinks thet made the false grave back thar?"

Light dawned suddenly on the king of scouts.

"Listen," he said. "I have been struck with an idea. Maybe it is foolish, but it grows on me. Two coffins were brought out, and buried back there, with nothing in



them. But might there not have been something in them when they were brought out of the town? If so, isn't it just possible that they were buried there empty simply to conceal them, after whatever was in them had been taken out?"

Old Nomad yelped like a wolf.

"Waugh! Waugh-h! I ketch yer idee. Ther things thet war in 'em war Wild Bill, and mebbe thet woman! Waugh!"

"Himmelblitzen!" gasped the German. "Vot a headt you haf got, Cody. I am bedtting you ar-re rightd; yaw, dot iss idt! Vildt Pill vos proughdt oudt here py der coffin in, unt afdher dot he vos taken der coffin oudt. Idt iss a skinch."

"If that is so," said Pawnee Bill thoughtfully, "then he must have been unconscious."

"Unt der voman she was inkinscious, also-o," the baron added.

"It would seem so; but he was not unconscious when he arrived at this point in the trail," Buffalo Bill reasoned. "This piece of cloth from his coat proves it. He tore it out, and dropped it here, hoping we would find it, and understand it."

Little Cayuse had straddled his pony and cantered back to the "grave." He was seen to circle round it, his head bent low, his pony on the jump. Having righted himself, he let out an Indian yelp.

"All same caballo track here, Pa-e-has-ka," he announced, when they came up to him. "You see um?"

He pointed out a track similar to one that had been observed in the trail—a track that had a nick in one side, showing that the pony making it had its hoof broken.

The ground round the "grave" was now gone over as with a fine-tooth comb. Buffalo Bill dismounted, and, with eyes close to the soil, examined it inch by inch. The others aided in the work.

At the end of five minutes there was no sort of doubt remaining that the ponies whose tracks were visible in the trail had been also at this point.

Buffalo Bill voiced the inevitable conclusion:

"It begins to seem that Wild Bill was brought out of the town in one of those boxes. We can take it for granted that he had been rendered unconscious, or it never would have happened. Here he was taken out of the box, restored to consciousness, and put on the back of a pony. If the woman was in the other box, the same can be said of her. No doubt he was tied to the pony, and his hands were tied, perhaps behind his back."

The king of scouts drew from his pocket the triangular piece of velvet.

"This is a smooth piece," he said. "With no seams, nor ornamentation; probably it came out of the back of his coat. It was night when the ponies passed down the trail. Our friend Wild Bill is clever. So, my guess is that he succeeded in tearing that out of the back of his

coat, even though his hands were tied, and let it drop in the trail, without attracting attention."

"Idt iss a skinch!" the baron bubbled.

"Your reasoning seems to be good, necarnis," Pawnee Bill admitted.

"Der schmugglers haf got him," the baron sputtered. "Iss idt not a reasoning enough? Idt iss Granger, unt—unt der Chinks."

"I opine ther baron is shootin 'straight," agreed Nomad. "Granger and the Tinijas Chinks would have et in fer him, o' course, an' ef they've got him——"

"Idt iss for rewenge."

"Yes, I allow thet's it; they'll have fun wi' him—they'll torture him up some, jes' ter show how they hate him, an' how mean they air; thet is," he added, with a long breath, "ef we let 'em!"

"Unt der voman also-o."

"I reckon," said Nomad, "they're hatin' her wuss'n they aire any of us; I hate ter think erbout et, ef she's a prisoner, in a Chink crowd."

"But—where can they be going?" Pawnee Bill queried.

"Dot iss for us to findt oudt," said the baron. "Who-efer vos going py dhis blace vos sure leafing der town. Dot vouldt pe Granger. Oof he stayed py der town in, he vouldt be exbosed to capture ag'in; unt so he iss gidt him oudt kvick. And der Chinks vot iss in der schmuggling pitzness der same vay; dhey vouldt git oudt. But varefer idt iss dot dhey ar-re going, tond't ask me."

"Thet's ter be found out," said Nomad. "Maybe thar's a Chink hidin' place out in the hills, an' they're headin' fer et."

It was agreed that this seemed likely.

"Take the trail," Buffalo Bill ordered, speaking to Little Cayuse; "we will be right at your heels."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BARON GETS A SURPRISE.

Following the pony tracks took them down the southern trail, to the Mexican border, which they reached that night; then beyond it, the next morning, in the direction of the Silverstone Mountains.

Two discoveries, that first day, indicated that they were in the wake of Wild Bill. One was a gold button, pounced on by Nomad, who picked it out of the dirt. There could be no doubt that it was from Wild Bill's velvet jacket. The other was one of Wild Bill's silver spurs, found by the king of scouts at the noon resting place of the band they were following.

There was, of course, a possibility that these had been dropped as "blinds," for the purpose of luring the pursuers farther and still farther from Tinijas. In that



event it seemed a certainty that Wild Bill was held as a prisoner somewhere, if he had not been killed; otherwise, these objects would hardly have been in possession of the pony riders.

About noon of the second day an Indian was sighted, in the Silverstone foothills. As he dropped out of view almost as soon as seen, Little Cayuse and Nomad were sent forward on foot to locate him.

The old trapper went in one direction, the Piute in another, to get the Indian between them. Then Nomad saw him again, crouching behind a ledge, where he was trying to get sight of the white men in the trail.

In spite of the fact that in some ways his years were beginning to tell against him, old Nomad still had eyes as keen as an eagle's. Making a tube of his hands, to cut out the sun glare, he looked the redskin over critically.

"Little Cayuse's find, to be shore," he grunted, with satisfaction; "which ther same is shown by ther fact thet he ain't w'arin' ary eagle feather. Little Cayues hez got et."

He began to study how he could "rake him in."

Creeping forward, he got a bunch of mesquite between himself and the Indian, which enabled him to cover half the intervening distance at fair speed.

After passing the mesquite, there was little else than scattered boulders crowned with cacti to aid his concealment.

Yet in work of this kind old Nomad was so 'clever that he still made good progress. Only once did the Indian look round, so absorbed was he in watching the white men in the trail; but Nomad sank as lightly to the ground as a falling feather, and passed unnoticed.

Having succeeded in getting behind a cactus-fringed boulder within half a dozen yards of the redskin, the old borderman rose boldly to his feet, and advanced.

It was then that the Indian heard him. Spinning round on his naked heels, and seeing the white man near, he was so astonished that he had not time to get out the knife that was slung at his waist in a belt of rawhide before Nomad was on him.

"Er, waugh-h!"

It was like the snarl of an animal, as the borderman launched himself; the next instant his fingers were tightening round the copper-colored throat of the scantily-attired aborigine.

"Lay still thar," commanded Nomad, flinging the wheezing Indian to the ground; then he covered him with a revolver. "Ef you don't cut up no tricks, I ain't goin' ter shoot ye."

The redskin rolled into a crouching position beside the rock, and held up his hands.

"Yer air a wise red," Nomad commented. "Yer aire some skeered, an' I cain't blame ye; but I'm plum thet inoffensive, when things goes my way, thet you needn't

be. Jes' hold out yer hands tell I ornaments 'em wi' this hyer han'some rope."

He took the lariat slung at his side, and bound the hands and feet of the Indian. Then he showed himself on top of the rock, and waved his battered hat.

"Yes, thet brings 'em!" he chuckled.

The party in the trail struck into a gallop as soon as they saw him, and came up the slope at a rattling gait, the trained and hardened horses and ponies climbing like goats. Toofer brought up the rear, mightily belabored by the baron.

From the other direction Little Cayuse bobbed in sight, chagrined by the fact that Nomad had made the capture. He arrived at the top of the rise almost as soon as the others.

"Wuh!" he exploded then, staring at the discomfited redskin. "Me got um feather."

A scowl passed over the face of the captured Indian when he saw his eagle feather in the black braids of the Piute.

"He'll knife ye fer et, too," Nomad warned, "ef he gets ther chance. You'll haf ter look out fer him."

With the Indian in their midst, the party squatted round, while Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and old Nomad began to catechize him, using all the Indian tongues of which they had knowledge.

Little Cayuse took a hand in the linguistic seance, but with no better results.

"Vhy tond't you dry him mit English?" demanded the baron, and fired a broadside of what he considered to be that language.

It struck through to the redskin's understanding—that was evident; but it did more—it brought a response that was little less than startling.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" the Indian yelled.

The baron jumped as if a knife had been run into him.

"*Ja wohl!*" he shouted back.

"Waugh!" Nomad squalled, in his amazement. "A Dutch Injun!"

"*Lieber Gott!*" gasped the baron. "Idt iss drue."

Then he yelled a question in his native tongue.

"*Ich bin Amerikaner,*" said the redskin.

"*Amerikaner,*" shrilled the baron. "*Ja, gewiss.*"

The Indian unwound more of the language of the baron's fatherland, to the baron's panting astonishment.

"Idt iss beadt me," he said, turning to his companions. "He tond't know enough Cherman so dot idt iss hurting him, but he iss claiming dot he iss an American, pecause he lifs on der American site oof der Mexican line; unt dot he is a friendliness. Vot iss a surbrising to me iss, he is saying dot vun dime he iss been lifing mit a Cherman, unt got dose moudhfuls oof Cherman vords oof him; vchich idt iss a lie, I bedt you. No Cherman oof sensidiveness is efer lif mit an Inchun willage."



"Go ahead," said Buffalo Bill, laughing; "ask him some more questions."

The baron complied, prodding away with more German inquiries. When the Indian failed to catch the meaning, the baron shifted to his English; and, after a fashion, by shifting back and forth, he made himself understood.

"Idt iss a funny sdory," he declared, "vot he iss dell-ing me, unt I pedt you idt iss some lies."

"Enlighten us, baron," Pawnee Bill urged; "don't be so selfish as to keep all the interesting things to yourself."

"In der fairst blace, idt iss a lie dot he sbeaks Cherman; he is know a few vords, unt murders der resdt oof idt!"

"Waal," Nomad drawled, his lips wrinkling with amusement, "he shore deserves credit fer thet, Baron—ef he murders et; et's a language thet could be spared without tears, ef he should kill et dead."

"Ach! Fool!" the baron sputtered. "Idt iss der lankvitch oof indelligence—oof scholars, unt uniwersidies; unt you——" His indignation choked his stream of declamation. Nomad dropped back, chuckling.

"Waste your breath on the Indian," Buffalo Bill urged, "and tell us his story."

"Idt iss some lies," said the baron; "budt here idt iss. He iss claiming dot dere iss nodt far off a Inchun cidy—a vonderful cidy, mit sdone valls; unt in idt many Inchuns, unt meppe some white mens, unt Chinks. Unt he says dot der Chinks which ve haf been following haf gone to dhis blace. But—ve cannot findt idt."

"Why does he say we can't find it?" Pawnee Bill queried.

The baron shrugged his shoulders.

"I am nodt knowing dot; he aind't tell me."

"Ask him if there was a white man, prisoner, with the party that passed along here," suggested Buffalo Bill.

The baron shot the query at the Indian.

"Ach! Yaw; he says der vos a man unt a voman."

"Then we are on the right track! Ask him some more questions."

The baron flung questions in a shower at the crouching redskin.

"Oof he could dalk petter Cherman I could findt me oudt a goodt deal more," he grumbled; "but vhen I ask him somet'ings he say dot I tondt sbeak der lankvich vell, T'ink oof idt! Dit you efer heardt der likes oof dot? Me!" He hammered his breast. "Me, a natif Cherman, unt not sbeak der lankvich mit a niceness; ach, lieber Gott, idt make me vandt to keel him. Sooch a insuldt."

"But what does he say?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

"I am dell-ing you."

"But his story—about this city, and the prisoners?"

"Von t'ing—he says ve cannodt findt idt, pecause he vill nodt show us; oof ve cudt him indo sissage meadt, he vill

sdill not show idt. Vot you t'ink oof dot? Himmelblitzen, he is a impudent."

"We can find it," said the scout, "by sticking to the trail of those ponies."

"He haf oxblained apowet how dot iss. Der bonies ve can findt; but dot iss all."

Nomad drew out his knife and ran his finger along the keen edge, eying the redskin.

"I reckon," he said, "I could skeer him into droppin' out all ther knowlidge he is harborin'."

If the trapper had such ideas, he knew the king of scouts would not permit even important information to be extracted by torture, and the smile on Nomad's face showed that he really did not mean it.

When the baron had exhausted his ingenuity, and gained no further information worth the effort, the Indian, still bound, was hoisted to the back of the led animal, which, by the way, was Wild Bill's horse, brought along for emergencies.

Then the task of following the pony tracks was again pushed.

But at the end of an hour it came to an inglorious halt; the tracks were lost utterly, on a sheet of lava which extended over many acres—a sea of black glass pitted with air holes.

At the end of another hour the ponies were located in a rocky glen, where there was grass and water, beyond the lava belt. But as for finding the tracks of the riders, after that, it was not accomplished.

The baron was still fuming when the mid-afternoon camp was made; it hurt his national pride, that an Indian should have been found who knew even a few German words.

"Der vHITE man he haf learnt uff vos nodt a Cherman," he declared; "idt vos a vHITE man vot vas a sure American, unt vos drying to gidt a credit for himself py sbeaking dot lie. Ach!"

Even when he had loaded his big pipe and sought consolation by the nicotine route he could not stop his audible grumbling.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CLEVERLY TRAPPED.

That same afternoon, the white-eyed villain known as Sim Hawkins, topping a hill many miles from Tinijas, espied an Indian sitting in comtemplative silence some distance away.

"Waal," he grunted, dropping into the easy vernacular, "luck is swingin' my way; thar's a Snake Toltec sun-baskin' like a lizard, jest when I'm plumb lost."

The Indian figure was wrapped in the familiar black-and-white-striped blankets used by the Snake Toltecs. His face was turned in the other direction.



Fearing that if frightened the Indian would scud out of sight like a scared rabbit, White-eyed Hawkins approached him with unusual care. Then he called softly.

"Asleep or drunk," he grumbled, on getting no answer, and he made another advance.

Finally he walked straight up to the blanketed redskin. "Hello!" he called. "I'm a friend, y' know; got turned about out hyer, an' don't jest know whar I am; so——"

The Indian turned round.

"Huh!" he said.

Hawkins gave an astonishing jump backward, so great was his amazement.

"Buffalo Bill's Piute!" he gasped, "when by rights he ought to be more'n a hundred miles from here!"

He was about to draw his revolver; but a number of dark objects, that he had supposed to be stones half buried in the sand, wriggled and sat up, and he discovered that they were men, with weapons in their hands—the weapons pointing straight at him.

Gurgling his fright, he looked from face to face, and saw before him Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, old Nomad, and Baron von Schnitzenhauser.

The latter first broke the silence.

"Idt iss a bity dot I haf to shoodyt you; budt I am going to do idt, oof you tond't kvick holdt oop your handts."

Hawkins' hands went above his head with surprising alacrity.

"Throw your weapons on the ground," Buffalo Bill commanded.

Hawkins took his hands down long enough to comply, unloading a miscellaneous collection of deadly hardware, then shot them above his head again.

"I'm caught," he said; "I'm not fool enough not to know it."

Nomad rolled out of his sandy bed and began to collect the weapons.

"Yer must er been expectin' ter do some fightin'," he remarked grimly, "by ther looks; two undergrown cannon, an' er littler one; wi' two hog-stickers, an' cartridges ernough ter supply er military company."

He raked them together, and put them behind him.

Hawkins had collapsed against a stone, unnerved by what had happened.

"Where are the Chinese and the Indians?" Buffalo Bill questioned.

Hawkins tried to look blank.

"For two days," said the scout, "we've followed a trail, which we took up near Tinijas; and it has led us here, then played out. We've been waiting for some one to come along who could tell us what became of it; you're the first white man we've seen."

"Your bein' hyar is some surprisin', too," said Hawkins, pulling his wits and his courage together by a superhuman effort. "And you laid a trap fer me. Waal, I'm bound

to admit it was a good one. I'm wonderin' whar you got the blanket; that's all."

He looked at Little Cayuse's head feather.

"You've killed a red somewheres, I s'pose, an' that accounts fer it."

"Ther red, which we didn't kill, is right off thar," said Nomad. "We'll show him ter yer when et's needed. Ther thing fer yer ter do is ter answer Cody's questions—not ter ask any."

"Our capture of the Indian, and other things," remarked Buffalo Bill, "has given us some information, and you are to add to it. We know that a man and a woman were taken as prisoners out of the town of Tinijas and brought over this trail. They were brought in boxes, or Chinese coffins, a mile or more this side of the town; there the boxes were buried, empty. Since uncovering the boxes we have found certain 'sign' in the trail, which makes us believe that the man who is a prisoner is Wild Bill. We are merely guessing that the woman is Donna Isabel; she is missing."

White-eyed Hawkins paled; still his nerve did not desert him.

"I don't know a thing about that," he said.

"We think you do, and we think, also, that you will admit it. The Indian we captured says there is an Indian city near here—a city walled with stone, which would indicate that it is Aztec, or Toltec, or else built by a northern branch of the Mayas of Yucatan. Tell us about that," the king of scouts commanded.

Hawkins hesitated.

"What do I git fer this?" he demanded abruptly.

"Better treatment than you could otherwise expect."

"That ain't enough," he asserted.

"No?"

"That don't do me any good. Maybe I might know somethin', if you fellers would let me go."

"We can't know if it is of any value," said Pawnee Bill, "until we hear it."

Hawkins cast him a malignant look; he had not forgotten, and would never forget, that Pawnee Bill had once flung the knife into his shoulder. Some day, he thought, he would avenge that.

"What about that Indian city, first?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

Hawkins turned this over in his mind.

"Waal, I can't find it," he declared.

"You mean, you don't want to find it—for us?"

"No; I can't find it for myself. That's straight. I was lookin' fer it when I saw that Snake Aztec blanket, and——"

"Snake Aztec! I guess you know something, and you will tell it."

Buffalo Bill, seated on the stone by which the Piute had squatted, drew out a revolver. Hawkins' face paled again when he saw it.



"You know me, and you know what I am here for. You are one of the opium smugglers, and we came here to get them; we captured you, and then your friends jumped in, and you escaped. But you will not escape this time unless you loosen up with what knowledge you have about the Chink smugglers, about this Snake Aztec city, and about our friend, Wild Bill."

Though his tones were quiet, they had a certain firmness and ring that made Hawkins quake in his boots.

"I'll willin' to tell what little I know," he said; "but—if I do, you'll let me go?"

"You'll tell what you know, and you are going to tell it to us right now."

The revolver bore full on his breast.

"I never like to threaten a man, Hawkins," said the scout, "but a murdering scoundrel and liar like you doesn't deserve any consideration. Now, speak up."

Hawkins sucked in his breath.

"Waal, I'll tell what I know. After that you'll let me go, Cody?"

"Begin at the beginning."

They ringed him in, and their faces were not kindly; the courage he had plucked together went to pieces suddenly, like a rope of sand.

"I'll tell everything, Cody," he whined, "and I meant to from the first. It happened—the beginnin' of it—back in Tinijas. The Chinks captured Wild Bill, and stored him away in a room back of the joss; it's a prison room, where they put Chinks that aire to git the bowstring."

"After that, when night had come, and she was hustlin' ter go away, I went into Donna Isabel's room at the hotel, and told her she'd got to go along of me. She didn't want to, and made a fuss; but she went. And I tuck her to that room."

"As I said, it was night then. Granger was there, and some o' the others. They had sneaked into the town, but was arrangin' to go out of it ag'in as quick as they could, fer we had word that your crowd was there, lookin' for him."

"Of course," he licked his lips again—they seemed hot and dry—"Granger knowed that no place whar you could git at him easy would be safe, so it was planned that we'd all git out, and hit for the Snake Aztecs; they're our friends. The Chinks was to help us, under cover of the funeral."

"So Granger and me, we crawled into a couple of the Chink coffins, and they tuck us out to the Chink cemetery; not to plant us, but so's we c'd slide out of the town easy."

"Wough!" Nomad gulped. "Then them coffins didn't hold Wild Bill an'—"

"Did y' think it?" said Hawkins. "Wild Bill and the woman was taken out by a back entrance, while the funeral was goin' on, tied, and gagged, and at one of the

livery stables they was loaded onto some hosses. It was easy, by stickin' to the back streets., I didn't see it—I was in a Chink coffin; but when we was all in the trail, straightenin' out for the long trip, I found it out."

"The coffins was buried by the trail, so's nobody would guess what had been done; I reckon nobody ever would outside of your crowd!"

His comment passed unanswered.

"One of the Snake Aztecs had been hangin' round the town, in a dirty blanket, pertendin' that he was a Mojave; he was to guide us, which he did. You have got him now, I jedge. Everything went along well enough. But you was after us, of course, as I know now."

His whitish eyes roved from face to face.

"Then—we was tuck into the Snake Aztec city; after the ponies was corraled in a sink hole in the hills somewhere round hyer. We was brought up to a bluff; then a basket was let down, and, two or three at a time, we was h'isted. And that's how we got in."

"There's a door, though; this mornin' I was let out by that door, and was told by Granger to pike out along the trail, and to come back in a hurry if I saw anything. Our Injun guide was already out, lookin' round. I piked; then, not seein' anything, I tried to go back. But thar's where I fell down; I couldn't find the gate ag'in, ner the blamed old wall; couldn't find anything."

"Wough!" Nomad rumbled. "You're lyin'."

"Honest I ain't," the unhappy wretch protested. "I knowed that when I come to that you wouldn't believe it, but if Cody should shoot me dead, I'd have ter stand to it."

"And you say," said the scout, "that Wild Bill and the woman are now in the Snake Aztec town?"

"They was, anyway; I don't know about now."

"How long ago was that?"

"I was set out by way o' the gate this mornin'; I cal'late they was in the town then."

"How many white men are in the town?"

"Half a dozen er more."

"Iss vun oof dhem a Cherman?" the baron demanded uneasily.

"I'm shore I don't know; wasn't no Dutchman in our crowd."

"I knowed idt; dose Inchun iss a liar."

"I think you've spoken the truth, Hawkins," said the scout, "and you'll not regret it. We'll try to make it easier for you, in the end. But you will have to help us. You have seen that wall, and you would know it again. Besides, we have our Snake Aztec prisoner, and we're likely to get some valuable help from him."

The others fired questions at White-eyed Hawkins.

"The town," he said, answering one from Pawnee Bill, "has got laid-up rock walls on one side. On the other sides it is natural rock, which was the thing that tumbled me out of the saddle. You can see a dozen natural rock



walls right from this spot, and there's plenty more; but I can't tell if any one of 'em hides the town."

"Wild Bill hedn't been hurt in any way, I reckon?" Nomad asked, his keen eyes flashing.

"No," said Hawkins. "They threatened some, but he would jest laugh at 'em, and it went at that."

"That's Wild Bill; a recklesser critter never lived. Et will be plum healthy, though, fer ther hull b'ilin', ef they don't harm him."

"Unt der vomans also-o," the baron added.

Buffalo Bill looked at the declining sun.

"We'll not be able to do much this evening," he said. "It is now so late. But we'll begin early in the morning."

The baron was still exploring the face of the prisoner.

"Idt iss a kvestion," he said; "aber dhere iss no Cherman py dot Inchun town in, how can an Inchun learn to *sprechen Sie Deutsch*? Dot iss vot make me a buzzlemendt."

But he got no enlightenment.

"There is another point or two on which I think you can give us information," said Buffalo Bill. "Do you know why Wild Bill and Donna Isabel were carried away by Granger's crowd?"

"They had it in for the woman," White-eyed Hawkins confessed with some bitterness. "Her mother was a Snake Aztec. I think her father was a Spaniard, or mebbe a Mexican. Anyway, her home had once been with that tribe, and for a long time. Of course, you don't know, I reckon, that the Snake Aztecs air mixed up in that opium smuggling; but it's so. The opium is brought into the Gulf of Californy by vessels runnin' from Chiny and the Sandwich Islands. It's unloaded at some little ports along there; then these Snake Aztec runners put it in bundles, on their heads, and bring it inland and up to the Mexican line; ginerally into their town. Frum there it is sent out to Tinijas, and to other places, where it is handled by Granger's crowd. So you can see that the Snake Aztecs ain't goin' to like anybody that has throwed 'em down; that's the way Granger figgered it. And he took the woman back to 'em, so that they could settle with her."

"Which means that he expects the Indians to torture her for what she has done."

White-eyed Hawkins squirmed a little at that.

"Mebbe not, Cody, but he thought the old squaws would make it interestin' fer her."

"I didn't think Granger was as bad as that!"

Hawkins tried to soften his statement.

"About Wild Bill now?" the king of scouts demanded. "Did they expect the Indians to torture him?"

"Waugh!" Nomad growled; it sounded much like the "Woof" of a bear. "Ef they does——"

"No," said Hawkins promptly. "He had a different

plan about him. Granger didn't know but mebbe you would foller; he was shore you would if you could strike the trail. And—— Well, he's a bit afeared o' ye, Cody, and that's a fact."

"Et shows his sense," said Nomad. "He'd better be!"

"So," went on Hawkins, "he thought he'd jest take Wild Bill along; and then if you crowded him, Cody, he'd have somethin' with which to hold you off, y' understand?"

"You might make it plainer."

"He could hold ye off, by threatenin' to kill Wild Bill, and then mebbe save his own hide by releasin' him to ye."

"I see!"

"Thar's one thing about Granger," said Hawkins, "he's allus lookin' out fer his own hide."

"Et'll be plum as full of holes as an old sieve before he gits through this campaign, I'm thinkin'," Nomad threatened. "Ef he thinks he can toy wi' Wild Bill, an' not hev ter pay fer et, his thinkin' machine is geared wrong."

"I can see now that he was a fool," admitted Hawkins, speaking to the king of scouts; "you're goin' to git him, Cody. He ought to know it. I know it now well enough. So——"

He hesitated.

"Well, I'll be fair with ye," he added. "I'll do what I can fer ye now, and if I knowed where that village was, an' that gate, I'd p'int 'em out; I shore would. If I do the fair thing now, you won't forgit it, when settling day comes, you won't forgit it, Cody?"

His tone had changed to a whining appeal.

"I think we can find the town, with the help of our Snake Aztec prisoner," the scout informed him. "But what help you give, if you play fair from this on, will not be counted against you; of that you may be assured."

"I know you're a straight man, Cody," Hawkins whined. "And I'll do what I kin."

He looked up, hearing words from the lips of Pawnee Bill.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I was just quoting an old rhyme," said Pawnee Bill. "It seems appropriate. It runs like this—you may have heard it:

"When the devil was sick,  
The devil a priest would be;  
When the devil was well,  
The devil a priest was he."

## CHAPTER X.

### IN THE HOME OF THE SNAKE AZTECS.

Fear of the revolvers of Buffalo Bill and his friends induced the Snake Aztec prisoner the next morning to offer to guide the party to his village.



But on discovering that the approach was over a naked lava plain that could not hide a rabbit, Buffalo Bill and his companions halted when they came in sight of the black obsidian walls, and decided to wait for the friendly shadows of another night.

Their fears for the safety of Wild Bill and Donna Isabel made this necessary delay peculiarly trying. However, they bore it as philosophically as they could, and spent the day in concealment, making all possible plans and preparations, and securing such further information as they could from the Indian and White-eyed Hawkins.

The additional information was little enough. One noteworthy disclosure was that the gate mentioned by Hawkins was not on that side; instead, there was a crazy ladder, which was nothing more than footholds cut in the precipitous face of the cliff, giving access to the town.

As soon as darkness had fallen the entire party moved with great caution to the foot of the cliffs. There were still no indications of an Indian town; in fact, there had been no signs of life, animal or human.

Here Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill prepared to make the ascent. The others were to remain in their places with the prisoners; but prepared to render what aid they could, if they discovered that aid was needed.

"Ef yer pistol goes off, er we hears yer whoop," said Nomad, "you'll find me and ther baron, likewise Little Cayuse, swarmin' up to yer some swift."

Having clung to his penitential attitude, Hawkins had informed them that there were at least two hundred Indians in the place, nearly a third of them warriors; the others being women and children, and that they were fanatical beyond belief.

According to Hawkins, the town was a sacred place, and it was considered impregnable. For these reasons, if the invaders were seen and captured, they could expect annihilation.

"I ain't tryin' to skeer ye, Cody," he urged. "I'm simply tryin' now to give ye a fair deal. You got to look out."

It was no easy thing to scale the cliff. Clinging with hands and feet to the small holes provided for the purpose, the king of scouts and his close friend went up slowly.

Drawing themselves carefully over when they had gained the top, they saw, in a cuplike valley, or depression in the hills, a town that seemed half Indian and half Mexican. There was a heterogeneous collection of houses, which appeared to have been pitched down in their places, there was so little semblance of streets. The houses were mere huts and hovels of mud, with the exception of some much larger near the centre. These were supposed to be the temple and the houses of the priests, for they had been told the Snake Aztecs had an elaborate religious system. One of the houses, they thought, might

be a prison, where Wild Bill and the woman were held, if they still lived.

The fear that the daring borderman and Donna Isabel had lost their lives was not cheering, so it was thrust aside as fast as it presented.

There were lights in the town, but no great illumination. It seemed that some of the lights were from fires in the houses, though a few burned in the narrow passages.

Pawnee Bill turned his head and looked at his friend.

"Well, Pard Bill?" he queried.

"The houses face toward the centre of the town," said the scout; "so, it seems to me, our play is to keep in their rear all we can, and advance on the larger buildings as we find opportunity."

"You are right, necarnis." Pawnee Bill tightened his belt. "Now I am ready."

As they slipped down into the midst of the mud houses they passed close by a guard whose duty seemed to be to watch the wall on that side. In the rear of the houses the shadows gave them shelter. Here they hastened on as fast as safety permitted, knowing that the moon would rise soon, when their danger would be increased.

Having worked their way by much crawling and short runs to the centre of the town, they lay for a time in the shadows of one of the larger buildings, while they discussed their next procedure.

The thump of an Indian drum broke on the silence. As if by magic Indians swarmed in the cramped passages before the houses, and moved on the largest building. Falling into line, they were led by a medicine man, who piped shrilly on an instrument of reeds. They passed close by the concealed scouts, who were thus able to determine their number approximately.

"About fifty warriors, I judge," Buffalo Bill whispered.

The Indians, revealed by lights that flared in their ranks, were togged out barbarically, in paint and feathers, with many brass rings on arms and legs. They kept jerky time to the music of the reeds. Now and then yells arose, wild and wolflike.

The big building was evidently a temple. A door opened in it, to receive them, and they passed within. Behind the warriors came a swarm of women and children, their talk a shrill scream. They, too, vanished into the building.

"Now what, Pard Bill?" Pawnee Bill asked.

"We're going inside, if it can be done."

"It seems that it will be difficult, necarnis; but I'm following your lead, you know."

"This way, then."

Buffalo Bill squirmed aside, and after a short crawl found an Indian house that had been emptied of its occupants. A stone fireplace in the middle of the room had a fire burning in it, which gave out light enough to see by.



There was but one door, and apparently no window; yet Buffalo Bill boldly invaded the house, trusting to the confusion round the large building to conceal his movements.

Pawnee Bill slid along at his heels as quietly, and came into the house right behind him. If he had not already known what it was Buffalo Bill hoped to accomplish here, he now saw.

The king of scouts took a blanket from a cot by the wall, pitched it to Pawnee Bill, and appropriated another for himself.

"They're of good size fortunately," he whispered. "Now, if we can find headdresses, or feathers."

They found both on the walls.

When they emerged from the Indian house, having borrowed these belongings, they could not have been told from Snake Aztecs a dozen yards away. The blankets were striped in the Snake Aztec fashion, and the headdresses bore feathers of red, blue, and black, like the one captured by Little Cayuse.

Skirting the rear of the big building, they came to a queer embankment. When they had crawled to the top, they saw that it stretched along in the form of a serpent.

"I'm beginning to understand the name of these people," said the scout. "They must be serpent-worshipping Aztecs."

Continuing along the back of the earthen snake, they rounded the farther end of the building, and by a half circuit came back toward the entrance in front.

A few Indians were still passing in, hurrying as if they knew they were belated. Within the temple sounded the thumping of the drum, the piping of the reeds, and an occasional howl.

"It's a risky thing, Gordon, that we're undertaking," said the scout, "and nothing may come of it."

"Still, we must see it through, necarnis; we've got to find out where Wild Bill is, you know."

"If we are detected we'll make a jump for this door," Buffalo Bill advised, "and get out the best way we can."

Stalking in boldly, as if they belonged there, trusting to their blankets and headdresses, the great scout and his friend got inside, and looked about.

The large room was closely packed with Indians; the drum and reeds at the front, near a stone throne, with the warriors close upon it, and nearer the door the women and children. A priest, or medicine man, in a wonderful headdress of horns and feathers, was powwowing away in a tongue that neither of the watching white men understood.

In the midst of this, excited talk and exclamations sounded off at one side.

"Deserted Jericho!" whispered Pawnee Bill. "What has broken loose over there?"

As if in answer, the voice of a woman reached them,

half drowned in a babble of Indian words—the voice, unmistakably, of Donna Isabel.

"Shades of Unk-te-hee," Pawnee Bill gasped. "You recognize that voice, Pard Bill?"

"Donna Isabel."

"Yes; but throwing Indian lingo. I think I'd like to know the meaning of it. From the sounds, I don't think she is having a happy time."

They became quite convinced of this when they heard the heavy voice of Jim Granger breaking in. He was mixing English words with Indian ones, and was making ugly accusations against the woman.

The scouts moved in the direction of the wrangle, and came to a stone passage, leading to a door. Behind the door was a room, which held the speakers.

They had no more than done this when an Indian came up behind them hurriedly. They let him pass, and he went into the room without a second glance at them. He left the door slightly ajar, perhaps without intention, and the words from the room reached them more distinctly.

It became apparent that Granger was accusing Donna Isabel, before an Indian council, of treachery to the Snake Aztecs.

There was a clamor against her when he had spoken; then her voice rose in defense. But they could not tell what she said. But for the explanations which had been received from their Indian captive, they would have been quite in the dark as to what it meant.

The conference became a violent dispute, then it broke up in a quarrel, and, the door flying open, the scouts beat a quick retreat, with the Indians who had been in there streaming along behind them.

From the small room the quarrel between Granger and his supporters and Donna Isabel was transferred to the larger room. Weapons were drawn, and a battle in the temple seemed imminent.

Ringed round by a few adherents, the woman backed into a corner. She had donned Indian dress, which became her, and she seemed a very princess defying her foes. But they overwhelmed her; the crowd in the temple surged upon her like a tide, until a door back of her gave under the pressure, and friend and foe went rolling out through it.

The temple room was nearly deserted, but it would not be so long, and the scouts got out of it while they had this opportunity.

In the shadow by the temple walls they talked of what they had seen and heard.

"Granger, on bringing her here as his prisoner," said the scout, "expected to have the tribe turn against her, and slay her, or torture her; but she has found a few friends, and they're trying to stand by her."

"I think you are right, necarnis," Pawnee Bill agreed;



"but the question is, has she got friends enough? It didn't look it. If she hasn't, it will go hard with her. But perhaps we can lend a hand."

They had not located Wild Bill.

## CHAPTER XI.

### WILD BILL IN PRISON.

Wild Bill Hickok lacked his usual joviality, as he sat in his prison pen, and reflected on his condition. He was blaming himself unduly for what happened, when the door of the room opened, and Donna Isabel came in.

He was astonished to see her there, behind her, in the passage, visible through the half-open door, stood a number of Indian guards, armed with knives and copper-headed lances.

The door closing on her, she spoke.

"You didn't expect to see me?"

He had arisen, with his usual courtesy.

"I didn't," he said, "for I thought you were as much a prisoner here as I am. Will you take this stool? It's not much of a seat, but it's the best I have to offer."

But she did not sit down.

"I haven't had a pleasant time," she informed him.

"You guessed that. Granger thought he could turn the Snake Aztecs against me; he has failed. But I'm not yet safe; he has a lot of friends, and they'll still give me trouble. But now that I'm here, and have triumphed so far. I intend to stand by my guns."

"Good!" he cried. "I admire your pluck."

"I've been considering what I can do for you," she said. "Of course, you can't stay here—and live; but I confess that right now I don't know how I can get you out of this prison, and out of the town."

"If those bloody guards weren't right out there, I'd risk getting out," he said.

"If you passed those guards, you couldn't get out of the town; the streets are full of Indians. Even if you were out of the town, they'd follow you, and run you down in the hills. No; some other plan must be worked out. You will have to give me time for that."

"I don't want you to run risks for me," he urged.

"I told you that we should have to help each other," she reminded; "when we had our talk, as we were being brought here. I feared, then, that Granger would be too strong for me here, and if that had happened, as he planned it, I should have been helpless. I came now only to let you know that for the time, at least, I have defeated him. He denounced me before the council, and wanted to have me tortured; he said I had betrayed the Snake Aztecs, when I had really only betrayed him, if that harsh word can be used to describe what I did. He made

some of the Indians believe him, and they are with him against me; but my mother's brother came to my help. Fortunately, he had influence and many friends. That saved me. Otherwise," she shuddered, "I should be in the torture chamber right now."

"If we can get out together——"

"I shall see that you get out; but as for myself, I don't know that I want to go."

This was surprising.

"You see," she explained, "my mother's mother was Queen of the Snake Aztecs; my own mother would have been queen after her if she had not fallen in love with a white man, my father, and abandoned the tribe. My older sister became queen then. But now she is dead. Since her death there has been no queen, and the sorcerer, Nekambo, has been ruler."

"That's the big medicine man," said Wild Bill.

"Yes, and my bitter enemy now, for he fears me—he fears that I may become queen, when his power would decrease and fade away. The Snake Aztecs take kindly to a queen, and my mother's brother has been trying to work up a sentiment for me. But just now Nekambo is able to hold his position. But," she added, with a fiery flash of her dark eyes, "I doubt if he will keep it long."

"If he does keep it," said Wild Bill, "you are going to have a lot of trouble, and my name will be—Mud."

Donna Isabel shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"I shall do the best I can. I know that it is now a life-and-death fight; but I think I shall win. Until I do——"

"I am to stay here. That is what you mean."

"Yes."

"I'd like to take part in the mêlée; inactivity, in a prison pen, never appealed to me. It's not the proper rôle for Wild Bill. I might crack a few heads, if you'd arrange it so that I could get into the next fight, which I can see you think is right ahead of you. Don't you think you had better give me the chance?"

There was a wild clamor beyond the door, and the dancing legs of the warriors there indicated some fresh excitement.

"I can't talk longer," said Donna Isabel, backing to the door. "Remember that I'll help you—if I live."

She threw the last at him, and jumped out into the stone corridor.

Wild Bill would have followed, in spite of her desire that he should not, if the door had not banged in his face.

He heard a heavy bolt click, as he threw himself against the door. Then he heard a wild outcry. He hammered at the door wrathfully.

But the confused sounds and yells faded out of the corridor, and he was left in the prison to nurse his disappointment.



## CHAPTER XII.

## DARING PARDS.

Donna Isabel knew that she had the battle of her life before her when the door of the prison rumbled, and she saw close by her in the corridor her uncle, Itlac, with a number of warriors forming his bodyguard, and beyond them a mass of unfriendly Indians, yelling and brandishing their weapons.

Itlac spoke sharply to her.

"You would bring death to all of us," he said. "Have you no sense, that you talk with the white stranger, in this time of trouble?"

He thrust a slender spear into her hands.

"Take it, for we shall have to fight," he said, "and follow me!"

He lifted his spear and shield, the latter of horsehide stretched over a circular frame of wood, and at the head of his men charged boldly on the yelling mass at the end of the corridor.

Donna Isabel ran close behind him. For the moment she was as much Indian as any warrior there. Her white training fell away, leaving the savage heart of this wild beauty bare. She shrieked in unison with the warriors of her mother's brother, and when a brave stretched out an arm to stay her she spitted him with the spear.

Nekambo's men, composed of the ignorant rabble, fell back before the onslaught of the better-trained braves, and Itlac's force gained the door of the temple.

Making a stand with their backs against the stone door, Itlac's men met here a second onslaught, which they repulsed, and with a countercharge swept the adherents of the medicine man out of the building.

When it was over Itlac stood panting beside the wild-eyed young half-breed, his face clotted with gore from a wound on his crown, while round him gathered the warriors who were trying to uphold his show of authority against the old priest.

Donna Isabel looked up at him as he towered beside her, her eyes showing admiration. Her veins were on fire; she was an Indian of the Indians, at that moment, ready to yield obedience to this man, or even worship him.

Suddenly, as her pulses leaped, she laughed harshly.

"Is it a time for laughter?" he demanded, with a frown. "Is it not rather a time for prayers to the god of the Snake Aztecs? Or did you laugh because you think the victory is won?"

She had laughed bitterly because of a memory of herself in the dancing hall of the Casino. She had been white then, in her sympathies and view point, so that the applause she had always received had seemed sweet. Now it looked pitiful, childish, unworthy. For was she not, by right of birth, queen of the Snake Aztecs? Round her were fighting warriors; not the thin-blooded, white-

livered crowd of perspiring white men, whose applause she now scorned.

Glancing at her, as she drew herself proudly erect beside him, Itlac had an inspiration. She was queen of the Snake Aztecs—a point for which he was fighting; but she did not look it, except for the striped blanket cast round her slender figure.

"It will not do," he said, speaking his thought aloud. "A queen should be clothed as a queen. They are in there—the clothing your sister wore; put them on."

She hesitated.

"What?" he cried. "You will not play the queen? Then——"

But she had turned and fled for the room.

She found the garments in a moth-eaten chest, and drawing them out she arrayed herself hurriedly in them.

When she appeared again in the midst of the panting and excited warriors, she was regal, from the Indian standpoint. Their eyes kindled at sight of her, and their yells arose.

But there were answering yells, beyond the door of the sanctuary; the braves of the medicine men were massing there again for a charge on Itlac's party.

Donna Isabel's fiery Indian uncle did not wait for the attack to materialize; he gave back yell for yell, then led his warriors in a rush for the door.

Through it they rolled, stabbing with lances and knives, yelling and screaming like so many fanatical devils.

Donna Isabel started to follow them, then thought better of it. But she stepped close up to the door, and listened to the clamor outside. Beginning to fear that all was lost, her hopes were revived by a sudden change in the character of the yelling. Itlac came stumbling back into the room, a number of his braves at his heels.

"They have fled," he said; "praise to the god of the Snake Aztecs!"

But even he could not understand it; all he knew was that, at a moment when he began to feel that the fight was going against him, the opposing force strangely lost its courage, and fell away in a jangling and quarreling rabble, then broke in wild retreat.

"The victory is ours," he said. "The god of the Snake Aztecs fought for us, and with us."

"Perhaps the priest is dead," she said.

Whether Nekambo was dead or living could not at once be determined. But since she had assumed the position of queen of the Snake Aztecs, by donning the queenly garments, the importance of performing the duties of the part was not to be questioned.

Pressing this duty upon her, Itlac brought into the room an ebonylike box. Having cleared out the warriors, he swung a kettle over a tripod, built a quick fire,



filled the kettle with water and sprinkled it with an odorous liquid, then departed, following the warriors.

Donna Isabel waited until he had gone, then took up her task. She was priestess, as well as queen, and she knew her rôle. More, she believed in it. So that as she set about her task her manner became as solemn and grave as if she were conducting a funeral.

While the fire burned fiercely and the water in the kettle began to bubble and send forth clouds of steam, she opened the black box brought in by Itlac. It held a dozen small snakes, rolled together in a knot. Disentangling them, she took them out one by one, caressing them and crooning to them.

If one proved unsubmitive and angry, she struck it on the head with a small black reed, like a bamboo, threw it harshly back into the box, and showered it with the liquid which Itlac had brought in the bottle. The odor, or the liquid, had a numbing effect apparently, for after that the reptile seemed submissive enough.

Finally, dropping the snakes into the box close by the fire, she turned to the contents of the kettle. She threw in leaves and herbs, and stirred the mess round and round. While doing this she wailed out an Indian chant.

How long she engaged in this she did not know; the ceremony had a hypnotizing effect, so that she lost knowledge of the passage of time; but she was aroused by a word in English.

Looking up, she was amazed to see standing before her two well-known figures—Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill.

It was a shock; she had believed they were in Tinijas, or far away; that they could be in the town of the Snake Aztecs, and within that sanctuary, seemed unbelievable. She stared at them stupidly, until she remembered that this was profanation—white men were not admitted to that sacred place.

It aroused her to wrath.

Plucking a serpent from the fire—for that is what she seemed to do—she hurled it at them.

"Back," she cried. "How dare you invade the mysteries?"

Buffalo Bill sprang aside, and the serpent, missing him, fell on the floor, where it coiled like a flash and struck at his boots. He kicked it unceremoniously against the wall.

"How dare you?" she gasped, her features convulsed. "How dare you?"

"What nonsense is this?" he demanded, for he was not pleased. "We came here, at the risk of our lives, to help you, Donna Isabel."

"But—but—you are in the temple; the sacred temple. It is pollution. Besides," she gasped, "how did you get here—how did you get in?"

"One question at a time," said the king of scouts. "You see that we are here, and that means, of course,

that we got in. If you will be sensible, and put down that snake"—she had caught up another—"we will talk with you."

She dropped the squirming thing into the black box; then she fell, rather than sat down, on the stone behind her, and stared at the white men.

"Speak!" she commanded.

"It will take but a few words, Donna Isabel," he said, "to tell all there is to tell. We followed the trail of the Chinese and white men from Tinijas, because we were sure that you and Wild Bill had been carried away by them. An hour ago, after reaching the base of the obsidian bluffs, we climbed into the town, my pard and I; then we worked our way toward the largest buildings. There has been a lot of fighting among the Indians—in this big building, and outside."

She nodded.

"Yes; I know. I have taken part in it."

"We mixed with the Indians, and——"

"And you were not discovered?"

"We took care to guard against that, you see; we secured blankets and headdresses out of one of the houses, and wore them; and so, in the excitement, we missed discovery."

"As I was going to say, we were close by that door when the fighting began a while ago, and we captured the big medicine man."

"What?" she cried, starting up.

"We think he is the chief medicine man; he was the leader of the party that was trying to get in. He turned, to avoid the charge made by the Indians who swarmed out, and as he did so he tripped over my foot—I had stuck it out in front of him; and when he fell I sat down on his head."

"You—you—what——"

She could not articulate clearly, so great was her amazement.

"The other Indians," the scout went on, "did not see their leader fall, and did not know what had become of him, though he was squirming under me like a lizard, and that started a panic. They broke apart and ran yelling, with those that had rushed out on them in hot pursuit."

"Then we got in here—by the door, which had been left open and forgotten. We dragged old What's-his-name in with us and closed the door, for we expected the Indians to get their wits in a little while and swarm back. The old fellow is back there now, with our blankets and head feathers, tied and gagged."

"Old Nekambo?"

"Well, we don't know what his name is."

"It is impossible!" she gasped.

"We heard you crooning away over here—though we



didn't know it was you—and when we came on to investigate——”

“And committed sacrilege!”

“When we committed sacrilege,” he amended, “you threw the snake at us. Apparently you had been boiling it in that kettle, yet it was alive.”

It seemed to her that he laughed.

She was a crumpled heap of bewilderment as the king of scouts finished.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BUFFALO BILL'S WITCHCRAFT.

The old medicine man lay in a heap close by the stone door, and beside him were the blankets and headdresses cast aside by the scouts when they discovered that the crooning woman was Donna Isabel, the half-breed dancing girl of the Tinijas Casino.

The girl would not believe until she had seen him there with her own eyes, and had heard again the story of his capture. Even then she was terrified, as his baleful glance fell on her. In spite of her white blood, she had strong Indian superstition.

“If this is discovered!” she cried.

“We can guess that if it is there will be some angry Indians,” the scout admitted. “But his capture helped your friends, and we expected that it would help us when we made it. We still hope so. We intend to hold him, for our own protection and as a hostage for Wild Bill.”

“He is near,” she said.

“Good!” Pawnee Bill cried. “Just show us where he is; then we are ready to fight our way out.”

They were interrupted by Indian voices outside; a clamor was rising again, showing, as they thought, that some of the medicine men's followers were regaining their courage.

“I don't think we have any time to lose, Donna Isabel,” said the king of scouts. “If you will pilot us to the place where Wild Bill is held, we'll try to get at him.”

She held up her hand.

“Listen! It is Itlac, calling to me.”

“Who is he?” asked Pawnee Bill.

“My uncle—my mother's brother; the one man in this place who can save us. I was engaged in the Snake Aztec mysteries, at his command, when you interrupted; I must go on with them.”

Fighting began again out by the door.

“It's our time, necarnis, while they're at that,” Pawnee Bill urged. He turned to the girl. “Just show us where our friend Wild Bill is, please; we haven't time to wait.”

“You must wait,” she said, and ran from the room.

When they tried to follow her, the door through which she had vanished held them back.

The fighting still continued outside. Anxious to get out, they went round the room, looking for a door they could force; but the doors were of stone, solidly fastened.

While they were engaged in this fruitless search, the girl reappeared, springing into the room without warning. She bore a robe.

“Nekambo's men are gaining,” she said, panting the words. “They say he is in here, a prisoner, and they are coming in to find him; my uncle is down, wounded, and

the fight goes against him. I fear it is because you invaded the temple; the snake god avenges such things.”

“Your white blood and education ought to tell you,” said Buffalo Bill, “that is foolishness. But what is the purpose of the robe?”

“I have thought of something. Over there is Nekambo, bound and helpless, but as soon as his friends are in here they will find and release him. He must be taken to another place. Then—then—you are to play Nekambo.”

The scout was astounded, so daring was the suggestion.

“I think you can,” the girl urged. “You are wonderfully wise; you have done many things more difficult. And I will help. You can wear his headdress and robes, and over all this sacred robe, which he wears only when engaged in the mysteries. I will crouch behind the fire, with a blanket over me, so that I will not be seen. And I will speak—I will speak for Nekambo. It is the only thing that can save us now. Quick; the stone door will be forced soon.”

Furious blows were being rained on it.

Under her directions, Buffalo Bill and his pard worked now like beavers. They dragged the bound medicine man into a small room which she showed them, and left him there with the door locked on him. Close by the door, as an additional precaution, Pawnee Bill took his station. He was armed with a lance, also with his revolvers, and the filched Indian blanket and headdress covered him. His face was smeared with paint.

Though serious work, what followed was like comedy.

When the stone door yielded and swung round, and the followers of the medicine man leaped in, they beheld Nekambo, as they thought, stooped above the sacred fire. The sight stopped them. The pretended medicine man passed his hands through the steam from the kettle; then he began apparently to pluck serpents out of the fire. One by one he tossed them aloft, caught them, and threw them down. The thick steam aided the deception; from the door it seemed to the watchers that he threw them into the kettle.

From a bottle he poured over his hands a liquid, which burst into flame, and his flaming hands, swinging through the air, waved the Indians into silence.

It was cheap trickery, but it held them spellbound.

Then apparently the medicine man spoke. The voice came from the girl, under the blanket behind the fire; but she gave it a hoarse croak, and the Indians thought the man was speaking.

“The snake god caught me out of the midst of the fighting,” said the voice, “and brought me into this place, where I was shown that what I did was wrong. It is useless to fight against the will of the snake god. His will is that the girl you have seen shall be queen of the Snake Aztecs, her word a law unto you; it is her right by inheritance. I shall contend against her no longer, and it is my wish that you shall not do so. I have sinned, and for that I am going into retirement a while. Now, leave me.”

The harmless liquid, a phosphorous compound, did its duty again; the flaming hands of the scout, dyed to an Indian red, waved the Indians out of the temple.

In bewilderment they retreated beyond the broken door. The disguised scout frightened them still further by following them; then he closed the door as well as he could, and swung a blanket across it.

“Now show us where Wild Bill is,” he commanded.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## WILD BILL AND THE QUEEN.

His prison door opening quietly, Wild Bill saw before him Donna Isabel in her queenly robes, her dark cheeks aflame. As he started up she turned with a quick motion and locked the door.

"It is for your safety," she explained. "If I failed to fasten the door you would throw yourself out there and be killed."

Wild Bill's eyes snapped.

"I could take away that key, and let myself out," he said.

"But you won't; you are a gentleman, and would not attack me when I am risking everything to protect and help you."

"That's right," he said. "You're safe enough. There has been a lot of wild-cat fighting. Tell me about it. And give me some hope, can't you, that I'm to get out of this pen before long! I suppose it means something—that dress you're wearing?"

He pushed out for her the stool he had been occupying, and sat down on the tiny cot of skins that lay against the wall as she took a seat.

"Tell me all about it," he urged.

"If you could get out," she said, not replying to his question, "you would go away at once?"

"It wouldn't take me long to shake the dust of this hamlet," he confessed.

"And you would leave me here?" she protested.

"No, of course not; we're in the same boat. You're as much a prisoner as I am, in certain respects. We'd try to get out together."

"But if I remained?"

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't want to. Why should you think of that? You were brought here by Granger, and you're in the midst of enemies—though you've got friends, too, of course."

She searched his face with her shining eyes, and the flame in her cheeks deepened.

"I think," she said, "that I shall want to stay, even if I can go away; the medicine man is out of the way for a time, and I have become—what do you think?"

"I shall think you have become crazy if you choose to stay," he asserted bluntly.

"Queen—queen of the Snake Aztecs!" she cried. "that is what I have become!"

"Then your side has won? It's what your Indian garb means; I ought to have guessed it."

"It is going to win; there can be no doubt of it, I think, since Nekambo is out of the way, and since——"

She was about to speak of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, but she stopped.

"Suppose," he said, "that your side wins, and that you stay here; suppose that you are queen of this village? What does it amount to? You are a white woman—in your training; and this is no life for you."

"It might be," she said. "It could be made very happy."

"How?"

"You are stupid, and I did not think it." The flame in her cheeks was now that of anger. "But perhaps you think of me as you do because I am half Indian!"

She threw the lock and stepped into the corridor, and

though he might, by a rush, have snatched away the key, there were warriors out in the corridor; and he was trusting that she knew what was best for him at the time.

A flash of understanding came to Wild Bill as he stared at the door after her angry departure.

"Heavens!" he said. "Did she mean that, I wonder?" He got up and walked uneasily round the limited space. "I believe that is just what she meant, and because I didn't see it she called me stupid. Ha! What would Buffalo Bill think of that?"

He sat down again, a smile curling his lips.

"Ha! Husband of the Indian queen! That would be a rôle for you, Wild Bill! She is queen here, and she wants to stay here; she is half Indian, and she thinks she will like it to rule over these fanatical and cruel redskins. And she thinks I ought to like it—to play king consort. By gorry, this is a new situation—a queen pitching herself at my head, and inviting me to share the royal throne. Wild Bill, you ought to feel flattered."

He laughed softly.

There was a rumble of talk in the corridor. Once he thought he heard the voice of a white man, and concluded it was the voice of Jim Granger.

Then Donna Isabel reappeared, coming in as softly and quickly as before.

"If I promise you protection with the Indians out there," she questioned, "will you promise me that you will not leave this town until I consent?"

He gave her a sharp look.

"Is there any hidden meaning back of that?" he asked.

"You distrust me?"

"Certainly not; but I wondered if the words covered more than I got hold of."

He noted that her dark cheeks were still flushed; also, he could not fail to observe that she was an uncommonly attractive woman in that barbaric robe.

"Do I have your promise?" she queried. "I am thinking of your welfare, you know. It isn't time yet for you to try to leave the town."

"Ah, all right," he said lightly. "Show me where your warriors are, and I make the promise. I want to get out of this hole; it's enough to kill a man to stay in here long."

She drew the door open behind her.

"You have given your word," she said. "Now I will take you to the warriors."

He followed her into the corridor, light of foot. It seemed the first step toward his release. The warriors fell away before them as she led on. Foremost in their midst was Itlac, her mother's brother, now the chief man in the village. His profusion of eagle feathers gave notice of that fact.

But when Wild Bill had gained the end of the corridor and saw into the room beyond he stopped short, sharp surprise and bewilderment, as well as delight, depicted in his face.

For there stood Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill. They were unharmed in the midst of Itlac's warriors, whose attitude was friendly.

"By gorry, pards," Wild Bill began, almost too puzzled for words, "this is the neatest surprise of the season! You seem to be masters of the situation here, and I thought you a hundred miles away."

They swarmed upon him, exclaiming their delight,



while Itlac's Indians stood by with stolid demeanor. Itlac glanced at the new queen, then came forward, producing a pair of revolvers and a belt filled with cartridges. Wild Bill recognized them as his own. He had been deprived of them in Tinijas. He clutched them with joy. The pistol king, his favorite weapon in his hand, feared no man.

"You will not forget your promise," said Donna Isabel.

Wild Bill flushed; then, without a word, he strapped the cartridge belt round his supple waist.

"You will need your pistols," Buffalo Bill informed him, in the midst of the explanations that began to fly back and forth. "We have achieved a temporary victory. The girl has been announced as the queen, but she has not been accepted as such by all the people, and there is likely to be more fighting. But luckily we've got the leader of the other side out of the way for a time."

"Explain, Pard Cody," said Wild Bill. "My head is buzzing round like a top. I've heard your words, but I don't understand. It has been too much of a jolt for me to see you and Pawnee Bill in here."

There was a running fire of explanations, mixed with questions and exclamations, at the end of which Wild Bill had a better grasp of the situation.

"I want to lay my hands on Granger," Buffalo Bill announced. "He's the leader of the other side now, since the medicine man dropped out of sight. But if we can't we'll try to get out of here, now that you are with us and the girl is safe."

Wild Bill seemed confused.

"By gorry," he said, "I'd like to jump right out of here, but, you see, I gave Donna Isabel a promise; when she let me out of that prison pen I told her that I wouldn't try to get away from the town without her consent. And"—he laughed—"I'm fool enough to be afraid now that she won't be in a hurry to consent. That seems silly to you, of course, but I'll explain it some time, if I can."

"I guess the time for talking has passed, and the time for fighting has come," declared Buffalo Bill, turning toward the outer door of the temple. "Listen to that!"

Wild yells had arisen out there. Mingled with them was the voice of Jim Granger, as if in command.

But Buffalo Bill and his pards were not slow in discovering that some of the yells came from the iron throats of old Nomad, the baron, and Little Cayuse.

## CHAPTER XV.

### FRIENDS IN PERIL.

Old Nick Nomad and his companions, condemned to wait outside the walls of the town while Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill entered it, suffered much mental discomfort.

They heard the sounds of fighting, and the clamorous yells, yet they listened in vain for any sound from their daring pards.

"Still, wi' them continuoal fireworks pervadin' the air, I ain't no ways restin' easy," Nomad confided to the baron. "Buffer an' Pawnee Bill mebbe hev got knocked on ther head, an' then they couldn't tip us no word ter come into the rescopin' bizness. I've half a mind ter swarm up thet wall an' take a look, anyhow."

"I vouldt go you," grunted the baron, sucking some degree of satisfaction out of his pipe. "I vouldt go you, oof I toughdt I could gedt me a skvint adt anodder Cherman Inchun. Dot iss a pitzness vot haf me buzled yidt!"

"Waal, thet don't worry me none," Nomad retorted. "Ef an Injun has got sense ernough ter l'arn English, I reckon he'd have sense ernough ter l'arn Dutch, give him a teacher. Dutch ain't much of a language, anyhow, so anybody'd orte be able ter pick et up easy."

"Ach! You insoolt me. Cherman—I am nodt sbeaking apoudt low Deutsch—iss der lankvitch oof der indellectualidy; oof a man haf nodt indellectualidy he iss nodt aple to learn idt; so idt iss nodt like English, vot any vool can learn; idt iss——"

"Waal, I ain't carin' what it is, baron. Ther question troublin' me is: shall we swarm up this wall an' see what's doin'?"

"Der brisoners!" the baron objected.

"Hang the prisoners! It's what I'd like to do, too, ef I had rope ernough ter spare. But they're tied snug, an' I allow they'll stay hyer." He turned to the Piute. "What does yer make o' thet yellin', Little Cayuse?"

"Injun heap mad," said the Piute.

"Yes, I reckon; they're fightin' mad. I allow, baron, I got ter take a peek, no matter. Go along with me, er stay behind."

But when the old trapper began to climb the wall, he found he had company; both the baron and Little Cayuse were climbing right at his heels.

On reaching the top of the wall, they drew themselves over, and saw, as their friends had done some time before, the village of mud huts lying in the depression below them. The rising moon gave them a good view of the town.

"Ther row seems ter be centrin' round them big houses down in ther middle, baron," Nomad whispered.

"Ve aind't seein' so mooch more here as ve vos a while ago," grumbled Schnitzenhauser. "I am pedtting dot Puffalo Pill unt Pawnee Pill haf been gabbtured dose Inchuns py, also-o. Couldt I haf a schmoke here—I subbose so? I am so tired idt vouldt resdt me. Yiminy, dot vos some climbings!"

"Smoke, an' be hanged to ye; maybe it'll help ye to keep yer mouth shet! What does yer make out, Little Cayuse, is goin' on down thar?"

Instead of answering, the Indian youth began to crawl down the slope in the direction of the houses.

"Ther way ter find out is ter investergate—heh? Waal, yer right, I guess, so I'm follerin' ye. Come along, baron—ef ye can keep still."

The baron groaned, stuck his lighted match in the sand, to put it out, and followed his companions.

They were halfway to the temple before anything happened to trouble them. Then a dog rushed out of a mud hut and flew at the Piute.

Little Cayuse, who was crawling along like a lizard, rolled to one side; his knife glimmered, and the dog, dropping over with a yelp, began to kick and thresh about.

"Sarved him right, an' 'twas the on'y thing ye could do," said Nomad; "but et means we've got ter move on in a hurry."

They had not gone on twenty yards when an Indian



discovered the dead dog, and raised an outcry. Before they had covered another twenty yards there were a dozen Indians round the dog, and a terrible hub-bub was rising.

Nomad rose to his feet and drew his knife. Little Cayuse also started up.

"Come er-climbin', baron," Nomad ordered. "Them reds aire movin' this way, an' we've got ter run fer et. Maybe we can play hide and seek with 'em in ther shadders o' thet biggest house; anyway, we'll hev ter make er try."

The baron climbed to his feet, and the trio set off at a rapid gait, taking little pains now to conceal their movements. Behind them rose a long howl of anger, and soon pattering feet informed them that they were being pursued.

Throwing back his head as he ran, old Nomad gave utterance to his war howl, knowing that if Buffalo Bill heard it he could not to recognize it; yet it seemed a reckless thing to do.

Having gained the nearest walls of the temple, Little Cayuse and Nomad ran on round them, and soon struck the serpent mound, up which they scrambled. The baron followed hard at their heels.

"Er-waugh!" Nomad howled again.

He pitched down the opposite slope of the mound, into the thick shadows, and ran on, between the serpent mound and the wall of the temple, his companions sprinting with equal speed.

Over the mound, and in sharp pursuit, came the aroused redskins who had seen the slain dog.

Nomad yelled again, rolling out the peculiar note like the wof of a bear. Then he received an answer. It was the wolf howl of Buffalo Bill, which in times of danger he had heard on so many mountain slopes, and it came from a point ahead of him.

"Waugh! Buffler!" the old trapper screeched. "Halleluyer!"

"Idt iss Cody!" panted the baron.

"Pa-e-has-ka," said Little Cayuse.

How that wolf howl roused them.

"Glee-ory; yes, et's him. Hyer in ther midst er the heathen, too, which I plumb expected, ef he warn't dead."

He became aware that Indians had appeared round the end of the temple he was approaching; he saw them swing out there, in the moonlight. Shifting his knife to his left hand, he drew one of his big revolvers.

Then he stopped.

"Reds ter the left of us, reds ter the right of us;  
Reds right in front o' us; likewise behind us!  
An' mebbly them redskins, because they've cot sight of us,  
Air thinkin' fer sure, thet they're goin' ter wind us!"

"Glee-ory! Thet's poetry, an' I didn't know I could make et. How clost aire them red niggers back thar, baron?"

"They ar're coming."

"Pooty fast, eh?"

He lifted his war cry again, and moved on.

But he stopped when he came near the Indians at the end of the big building, for, though Buffalo Bill's cry had sounded there, he was too wary an old fox to run headlong into the midst of enemies.

Then he heard Pawnee Bill:

"Come on, old Diamond; friends are here!"

"Halleluyer!" Nomad yelled.

"Ach, idt iss a bleasantness to hear dot woice," the baron panted.

Without more ado they sprinted ahead, and in another minute were in the midst of the Indians, and saw their friends—Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and Wild Bill.

"Der dhree Pills!" cried the baron.

"Correct, baron," Wild Bill flung at him. "Too many pills for those reds out there to swallow."

"Thar's about er million more comin' behint us," said Nomad. "But—shake, ole pard. We come er-huntin' fer yer, an' we've found yer. Ye cain't git lost frum Buffler. Is et fight now, er run some more?"

The warriors who were with the three Bills were Itlac's; their present feeling one of friendliness, through the influence of Donna Isabel. But enemies were in front, under command of a young chief, a friend of the medicine man, and with them were Granger and the white men and Chinamen who acknowledged his leadership. In addition, the Indians who had pursued the baron and his companions were coming up rapidly, howling like wolves, and had to be reckoned with.

These two companies of foes placed Itlac's men and our friends between fires; it seemed, therefore, the part of wisdom to make a quick retreat into the temple. Its door was but a few yards off, and Buffalo Bill led the way.

"We'll talk, when we get inside," he said. "Come along, everybody!"

When the temple threshold had been passed Donna Isabel was to be seen, in her Indian robes, hovering over the sacred fire. She looked up and frowned; she was so much of an Indian in her feelings that she disliked the intrusion of the white men.

But when she saw Itlac's warriors, and Itlac himself, following, her manner changed.

"I suppose it is necessary," she said to the king of scouts; "yet I have been afraid—very much afraid—since you tampered with the mysteries, and played witchcraft."

"What nonsense!" he said.

With the help of his friends, he was closing and barring the broken stone door; against it arrows were already rattling futilely.

"Religion is never nonsense," she opposed.

"Well, if you feel that way," he said more mildly, "we will not discuss it. We are safe in here—for the time."

"But how we're to git out is stumpin' me," Nomad declared.

"The thing that is stumping me is why you are here," said the scout.

The trapper scratched his grizzled head, considering this a rebuke.

"Waal, yer see, Buffler," he explained, "we jest couldn't remain out thar, not knowin' what was happenin'; thar war so much wolf howlin', an' band music, an' shootin' up of things, thet we plumb bergun ter believe you had gone under, so we was obleeged ter come. Then Little Cayuse thar, he must go an' run his knife inter a pesky Injun dog thet charged him, and we had ter kite. Waugh! I reckon our topknots would soon be dryin' in one o' these hyar mud houses ef you had been reely snuffed out. Ye see, I'm apologizin' dutiful an' prompt, an' I hope ye won't hold et ag'in us."

The scout laughed.



"You're all right, old Diamond," Pawnee Bill told the old trapper.

"Budt der kvestion dot iss dtroupling me," said the baron, "iss, Haf you seen anodder Cherman Inchun?"

When the door had been secured, Buffalo Bill saw that Donna Isabel had returned to the fire, and was feeding it so industriously that the cloud of steam from the hissing kettle almost concealed her.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### UNEXPECTED RELIEF.

It was not to be expected that Nekambo's friends and Granger's men would not try to dislodge Buffalo Bill's party from the temple. What they considered its desecration roused the Indians outside to a state of fury, so that they did not hesitate to ram the door with beams of wood, in spite of the danger.

When it fell at length, Granger was seen leading the force there; but he paid for his desperation, for he dropped under the revolver fire which drove the Indians back.

The door was made fast again, and for a long time there was no further disturbance. Then a number of Indians, gaining the roof, tore away slabs of stone and beams of wood, and rained down a shower of sticks and stones.

But it was easy to avoid this by standing close against the walls. And so long as no harm was done, Buffalo Bill would not permit any one to fire at the Snake Aztecs on the roof.

For an hour or more, while this continued intermittently, the white men in the temple considered ways and means, looking to an escape from the temple and the town.

Near the end of this period they heard a dull sound somewhere, like the fall of a stone or of a heavy body, but as similar sounds had been heard frequently they gave this no attention.

But when Donna Isabel, who now and then flitted out of the room nervously, only to return in the same manner, announced that Nekambo was gone from his close-at-hand prison, and they discovered that he had climbed to a high window slit and had wriggled through it, they thought they understood; he had, they believed, leaped down from the window to the ground outside.

This apparently put even a more serious face on the situation. Donna Isabel was thrown into a panic of fear by the discovery, and even stolid Itlac manifested great uneasiness.

"You see," the girl wailed to Buffalo Bill, "they will learn now that the mystery witchcraft, which they thought was his, was not his—that you were wearing his robes while he lay tied up out there, and that will enrage them beyond measure. I had a feeling all the while that it was wrong to do it; that the Aztec snake god would punish us for it. And now you see what has happened."

"They will find getting in here quite as hard a job with Nekambo as without him," said the king of scouts, who was not easily frightened.

Still, he wished it had not happened—regretted the escape of the old medicine man. It would make their own contemplated escape from the temple and the town doubly difficult apparently.

To their astonishment, however, no assault on the stone door followed. For some time the Indians outside had been comparatively quiet, and this condition continued.

It was broken at the end of half an hour by an unearthly wailing.

The girl started up from the fire when she heard it.

"Some one is dead!" she said impressively.

"Waugh!" Nomad gurgled. "Granger is dead—I seen him fall, and I reckon thar aire others."

"But some one of importance," she added. "Some Indian of importance."

"Thet young chief thet was leadin' may hev got et; 'twouldn't s'prise me. He war right in ther front, wi' Granger, an' jest as reckless. Et's Injun nature ter kick up a hullabaloo when a chief falls."

She nodded an affirmative.

"I think you must be right; the young chief was killed in that last charge on the door."

"Sarved him right, ef he was," Nomad grumbled. "We ain't askin' nothin' but ter be let out o 'hyar with our friends; we ain't pinin' to hurt nobody ef we ain't pushed. 'Twar they're fault thet Wild Bill was brought hyar."

The wailing continued.

At the end of another half hour some one hammered on the stone door of the temple.

"Shall we open it?" Pawnee Bill asked, when the hammering continued.

Itlac seemed inclined to do so; he was anxious to get out and learn what the wailing indicated.

"Et's mebbeso er trick," Nomad objected. "Yer cain't trust Injuns. Thar ain't no believin' how treacherous they kin be sometimes. I ricklict onct, thet one called ter me in a bunch er bresh, sayin' that he was sick an' dyin', an' wouldn't I come an' git him some warter. When I went, like a fool, he had a dozen with him, and they jumped me. I'm kerryin' scars yit frum ther fight I made, an' ef Buffler hedn't come ter my rescow ther critters would er roasted me over a slow fire; they war preparin' to do et when Buffler cut in on 'em an' spiled their fun."

When the tapping on the stone door went on, Itlac, as well as Buffalo Bill, suggested that Donna Isabel should speak to the Indian there.

She stepped close up to the door.

"We hear you," she said, addressing him in his own tongue, which she used as readily as English. "We will listen to what you have to say. But we are prepared for treachery."

There was a tremendous stir among Itlac's warriors when the answer came.

She whirled in flaming excitement and translated it:

"Nekambo is dead!"

Itlac jumped to the door, and began a furious conversation with the Indian outside. Then he turned and addressed his warriors.

Again Donna Isabel translated for the benefit of the white men.

"He was found dead at the foot of the wall out there. They do not understand it," she added, "but I think when he jumped down from that high window the fall killed him. They think he was killed by the snake god; he was supposed by them to have all power, yet he permitted the desecration of the temple, and they say that the anger of the snake god was shown against him by the fact that



when he last celebrated the mysteries here his voice was changed, so that it croaked like the voice of a lizard, and now the snake god has destroyed him."

Itlac was still chattering with the Indian outside, while some of his men moved to the stone door to open it.

"Granger is dead, they say," she continued, "and Nekambo is dead; so they are willing to accept me as queen of the Snake Aztecs!" Her voice rose in her excitement. "But they demand that the white men shall be expelled from the temple, which they are desecrating by their presence."

"'T would be hard," Nomad grumbled under his breath, "ter desecrate a hole like this, I reckon; but Injuns aire—waal, they're Injuns; only some aire more foolish than others; these hyer aire ther wust."

"That bodes us no good?" Buffalo Bill asked her. "They will jump on us as soon as we are out of this place?"

She took Itlac's position, and fired questions at the spokesman outside.

"No," she said, turning to the king of scouts, "they declare that if you are willing to go out peacefully, they will not trouble you."

"I wouldn't trust reds like them, not 'z fur as I could sling a steer by ther tail," Nomad growled. "Yer cain't b'lieve 'em, Buffler."

But Buffalo Bill thought otherwise, and he was backed in his belief by Hickok and Pawnee Bill.

Itlac's warriors were straining at the door to slide it open, and the white men did not try to interfere.

When the stone door had been swung aside, a large body of Snake Aztecs was seen before it, and though they were armed, their manner was anxious, rather than warlike.

With their weapons ready for instant use, the white men passed outside, after Itlac had guaranteed them protection. And they were not disturbed.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### CONCLUSION.

The moon was high in the sky, and its white light, flooding the cuplike depression which held the town of the Snake Aztecs, gave a silvery glory to the mud huts, and made the temple seem more mysterious than ever in the eyes of the Indians.

A hush had fallen on the town; the powerful snake god was angry. Under that anger Nekambo had fallen, and direful things were predicted if the desecrating white men from Tinijas did not leave with all speed.

Buffalo Bill wanted to see the body of Jim Granger before departing. He was taken to the spot where, it was said, the body could be seen; but the body of the treacherous sheriff of Conejos County was not there.

The scout was momentarily angered, suspecting trickery; but when he saw that the Indians were amazed he began to think that some of Granger's friends had taken the body away, or that Granger had not been killed, but only wounded, and had taken himself away.

Not a Chinaman was to be found except the few who had been slain in the fighting; the others had crawled into holes somewhere, and the Indians would not rout them out.

"I guess the only prisoner we'll be able to take back to Tinijas," remarked the king of scouts, "will be White-eyed Hawkins."

"Ef he is thar whar we left him," Nomad added.

As the scout and his companions passed down toward the one easily accessible gate, escorted by Itlac's warriors, Donna Isabel appeared.

It was as they had anticipated—she had made up her mind to remain. But she no longer claimed that a binding promise forced Wild Bill Hickok to do the same; she had become ashamed of that, perhaps, as she did not now even refer to it, though she saw that he was ready to depart with the others.

"I know that I shall not be able to make you understand how it is—how I feel about it," she urged, "but it is not wholly because I am an Indian that I want to stay here, nor entirely for the reason that they have made me their queen; it will be a better life for me. As a girl singing and dancing in places like the Casino there was no future before me; soon I should be too old even for that. Here I shall reign. Is it not better than dancing and singing in the Casino?"

She extended her hand, and Buffalo Bill took it; she was still in her Indian robes, and in the white moonlight she looked indeed queenly, in a barbaric fashion.

"I think you are right," he said simply. "But," he added, "don't let the Snake Aztec superstitions get the better of you; that is where your danger lies now. You may be able to do them good—these Indians; I am sure of it, if you try."

"Good-by," she said. "I may never see you again."

She said farewell to them, one by one; not even Little Cayuse was omitted.

"I am Indian, too," she said to him. "There are some good Indians that are not dead—you are one of them."

"Thet ain't no lie," Nomad approved, as the Piute shrank back, abashed by this attention.

"Der kvestion iss," said the baron, when she took his hand, "how can a Inchun py dhis willage in, learn to sbeak Cherman, which iss a lankvich oof indelledtualidy?"

"Cut et out, baron," Nomad grumbled.

"The reason," she said, "it is simple: There was a German missionary here once who tried to convert these Indians, and they killed him."

"Ach! Himmelblitzen. Vot a fool he vos," cried the baron.

They passed out by the stone gate, close-herded by Itlac's braves, and in the bright moonlight went down the slope beyond the heavy walls.

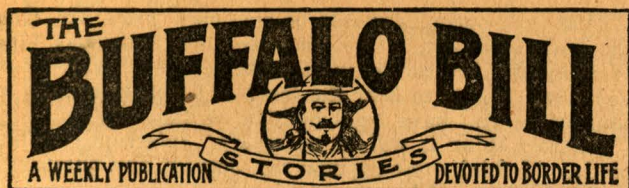
They took but one prisoner back with them; that was White-eyed Hawkins. The "German Indian" they released.

But Wild Bill had been rescued, and that was victory and satisfaction enough.

### THE END.

"Buffalo Bill's Mountain Foes; or, Pawnee Bill and the White Queen's Vengeance," is the story for the next issue. It tells of the strange and exciting climax of the Bills' hunt for the opium smugglers on the Mexican border. The smugglers, finding themselves almost run to earth, play their last card, and it comes very near being a trump. The story is literally a detective story, Indian story, and two or three other kinds of stories, all rolled into one. Be sure you get it. Out next week.





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## A SCHEME THAT FAILED.

Walter Gray, a clerk in the Central Bank, walked leisurely toward the station one evening, his mind evidently preoccupied. He was speedily recalled to a sense of his surroundings when, crossing a narrow street, he felt a swift wrench upon his watch chain.

"Hullo, you young scamp!" he exclaimed sharply. "What are you up to?"

The "young scamp" did not wait to explain, but, having failed in his object, took to his heels with all the nimbleness of a goat. Unfortunately for him, however, he was not nearly so sure-footed; his toe stubbed against the opposite curb, and down he came an awkward cropper. Before he could scramble up Walter had him by the scruff of the neck. Writhe and wriggle as he might, he could not shake off that sinewy grip.

"You've done me; I'm blown," he gasped at length, abandoning the attempt. "You'd never have collared me if I hadn't fell over these 'ere busted boots of mine."

The brogues in question were certainly never made for the feet they now partly covered. They were undeniably "busted," and "busted" badly.

"Well," said the lad sullenly, "why don't yer call a perliceman to me? I s'pose that's the next move? There's one a-comin' round the corner—shall I whistle him up for yer?"

"That's precisely what you deserve," returned Walter, smiling in spite of himself.

"Oh, I don't care. I done time afore to-day, I have. Anyways, they don't starve yer in prison, like they do out. Now, shall I whistle?"

Walter glanced at the arab's pinched and prematurely aged face—a face that told its own tale of past privations—and his heart softened within him. After a moment's hesitation he plunged one hand into his pocket and brought out a half dollar.

"Here you are," said he, releasing his hold. "Go and get something to eat. Only don't try these tricks on again; they're sure to land you in trouble."

"Ah, you're one of the best sort, you are, sir." The boy spat upon the coin for luck. "I wish I could do anything for—"

"That's enough; now cut!"

And the ragged urchin "cut" accordingly.

A month or so after this display of magnanimity—"a deliberate encouragement of crime," his friends termed it—

Walter was called into the board room of the bank, where the manager and two of the principal clerks were dealing with the morning's correspondence.

"Ah, Mr. Gray," said the manager, looking up from his papers, "you are acquainted with the district around Besford, I believe? Mr. Grayson has written to ask that the jewels which he deposited for safe-keeping in our hands may be sent down to his residence to-day. His wife, I understand, wishes to wear them during certain festivities to be held there. Owing to the illness of poor Jones, who on former occasions has conveyed the valuables to and from the bank, I thought, perhaps, you would kindly undertake the duty in his stead."

Walter readily acquiesced, flattered at being intrusted with so important a mission.

An hour's run by railway brought him to Besford, the nearest railway station to Mr. Grayson's residence, and about two miles distant therefrom. Contrary to what he had been led to expect, there was neither servant nor conveyance waiting for him at the station, and while Walter was standing in some doubt as to the course he had better adopt, a young fellow in cycling dress came hurrying across the station yard toward him. Walter at once recognized the newcomer as Henry Usher, a nephew of Mr. Grayson.

"I say, you're from the bank, aren't you?" exclaimed young Usher eagerly. "I almost missed you; I'd an idea the train wasn't due for half an hour yet. But what's become of Mr. Jones; I thought he would bring the things, as usual."

Walter explained how it was that he had taken the place of Mr. Jones for the nonce.

"That's very awkward, you know," Usher added, rubbing his chin perplexedly. "I suppose it's no use my volunteering to take the articles up to the house for you? No, no; of course not. Your instructions are to give them into the hands of my uncle. Quite right, too. Well, you see, when I said I would meet Mr. Jones at the station, I expected to meet Mr. Jones. So I rode over on my tandem bicycle, knowing that he wouldn't mind occupying the other saddle back. But perhaps you ride a bike yourself?"

Walter laughingly responded that most people did nowadays, and that for his part he would be glad of the chance to stretch his legs.

"Then it's not so bad, after all," said Usher, recovering his spirits. "The machine's just outside the gate, and I've got some trousers clips handy."

A few minutes later they were spinning along the highway—Walter's cowhide bag, containing the japanned jewel case, slung from the lamp hook in front. He, himself, being the lighter of the two, took the foremost seat.

For over a mile they kept to the highway, afterward turning into a lane, flanked with hedges and overhung by the trees of Besford Woods. Here, on account of the rutty nature of the ground, they had perforce to reduce speed somewhat. Since quitting the main road they had not met a soul; and they were considerably startled, therefore, in rounding a curve in the lane, to find three sinister-looking men planted directly in their path.

"The neighborhood swarms with tramps and blackguards," said Usher. "One is never safe from molestation even in the public roads, and this crew look as if they mean ugly work. We'd better clap on pace and rush through them."

But when the riders drew abreast of the trio, a handful of sand and turf struck Walter full in the eyes. Blinded by the dust and grit, in intense pain, the cyclists drove up the bank and into the hedge, where the machine collapsed under them.

Two of the assailants flung themselves upon Walter, who, struggling in utter darkness, was quickly overpowered, gagged, and bound by the cords with which the scoundrels had provided themselves. The first object his smarting eyes perceived was young Usher—secured in a like fashion by the third ruffian.



"Lug 'em into the wood," said one of the gang. "We'll finish that job first, an' then we'll see what's in the bag. Ha, here comes Luke; he deserves his share; he's kept a good lookout." A lad, in whom Walter identified the would-be pickpocket of a month ago, ran up at this juncture. "Here, Luke, shove this bicycle out o' sight behind the bushes, an' help us with these young swells. Their mothers won't see 'em home to tea to-night, I reckon."

The captives were dragged through the brushwood into the thickest part of the wood, where Usher was fastened to a slim pine tree.

"Best keep 'em apart, so if one gets loose—which isn't likely, I guess—he'll have a hunt for it afore he finds the other," suggested the man who had previously spoken. "Just run through their pockets first, Luke; you're a smart hand at that."

A few hundred yards farther on Walter was also roped firmly to a sapling, and left alone with his thoughts. Assuredly these were none of the sweetest. The gems were gone! And here was he, their trusted custodian, unable to budge hand or foot, helpless as a trussed chicken.

Night, too, was beginning to fall, and Walter wondered how many hours might elapse—how many days, even—before any one chanced to come near that sequestered spot. As he was without any means of attracting attention, it was clearly possible that any one might pass within a dozen yards of the place and yet never see him. The more he pondered his situation, the more hopeless and gloomy did its aspect appear.

As near as he could judge, he had been about two hours in this unenviable position, his limbs fast growing numb, when he heard the snap of a twig close at hand. Again came the sound, and Luke crept stealthily out from the undergrowth.

"They're just a-goin' to the station to catch the train," he said, in a whisper. "I said I'd call as we passed to see as how yer was still fixed up safe, so we needn't be feared."

Walter rolled his eyes; it was about all he could do. "Yer done the straight thing by me once," Luke added, "so now we're quits. Leastways, we shall be when I've cut these ropes. But afore I do that, you've got to promise as yer won't set the coppers on our track for three hours yet. Then they can catch us if they can. My pals has been good pals to me, and I'm not a-meanin' to leave 'em without a chance. Will yer promise faithful?"

Having no option, Walter agreed to the conditions by nodding his head. A moment later he and his tongue were both free.

"But the jewels!" he cried anxiously. "What has become of them? Can't you manage to get them from—"

"Jew'ls—what jew'ls is them?" rejoined Luke quickly. "Yer don't mean as there was any diamonds in that 'ere bag, do yer? If on'y Blobs an' Mike had knowed that, yer might bet your bottom dollar they wouldn't have handed 'em over so sharp. Jew'ls, was they?"

"Handed them over?" repeated Walter confusedly.

"Course they did—soft as yer like. Don't you see, sir, it was all a regular blind—a put-up job. That other young gent planned it, an' offered us ten dollars apiece to work it off for him. Bless yer, his eyes didn't catch none o' the sand we threw, nor he wasn't really tied up to that tree. That was part of the fake. And now it's him as has walked off with the bag an' all—"

At this point, in response to a distant whistle, Luke darted away among the trees.

True to the pledge exacted from him, Walter did not attempt to quit the wood before the three hours' grace had expired; then he made the best of his way to Mr. Grayson's house. Usher had also apparently but just arrived, for Walter, on being shown into the library, found him in the middle of a graphic description of the assault and robbery, to the details of which his uncle was listening aghast.

"That such outrages should be possible!" cried Mr. Grayson, with emphasis. "It's disgraceful—scandalous! Yes, Mr. Gray, this is a bad business. The jewels all gone—every one! And who is to bear the loss? The bank must be responsible—I will have legal opinion on that—"

"I hardly think it will be necessary," interrupted Walter quietly. "I think your nephew can prevent any question of that kind arising, if he pleases."

"What's that?" exclaimed Usher, his color changing.

Mr. Grayson looked searchingly at the speaker, whose perturbation grew excessive under the bold, shrewd gaze. Unconsciously, perhaps, though the action was significant, Usher involuntarily passed his hand over the pocket of his jacket.

"What I mean is this," returned Walter, noting the hasty movement, "that the whole affair was under your direction, that it was all a plot to possess yourself of the valuables. I mean that the jewels, taken out of the case, are even now in your pocket."

"A lie—a confounded lie!" cried Usher, white to the lips.

"Be careful, Henry," Mr. Grayson put in sternly. "Your face betrays you. Besides, I haven't forgotten that money-lender's threat the other day. More disreputable debts, I suppose? No doubt Mr. Gray can substantiate his accusations by calling witnesses whom you would not probably care to see."

Indeed, for all the real culprit knew to the contrary, his accomplices might have been in waiting below, as willing now, to denounce as they had before been to aid him.

Incoherently mumbling something about "duns and gambling bets," young Usher drew the loose trinkets one by one from his pocket; then, dropping into the nearest chair, he bent his head in despair.

"Pray leave us now, Mr. Gray," murmured Mr. Grayson brokenly. "I would spare you a painful scene. Here is the receipt for the jewels. I will at once give the servants orders to see to your comfort until you are quite ready to be driven back to the station. Sad as this trouble is, but for you it might have been infinitely worse. I can only say—thank you."

## A NARROW ESCAPE.

Whistling cheerily, his skates swinging at the end of their straps, like unwieldy pendulums, Phil Elliott trudged briskly across the fields to the main road. Lightly he vaulted over the gate, nigh dropping upon the toes of a tall, swart-skinned man, who, standing near the hedge, was gazing this way and that, in evident perplexity.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Phil. "It was careless of me—"

"No damage done, young sare," returned the stranger, in foreign accents. "I think I lose my route. It is for Mistare Elliott—Maxfield Lodge. Perhaps you show to me, eh?"

"Certainly," replied Phil readily. "The house is a good three miles from here by road; there's a short cut by the lane yonder, and the railroad footbridge, which will— But I'm going that way myself."

"Ha! that is so? We will together, then, is it not?"

Phil at once agreed to act as pilot, although he could not help wondering what engagement his father could possibly have with this saturnine-looking foreigner. In some degrees his curiosity was gratified during the next quarter of an hour, for his companion clearly felt in the humor to be loquacious.

"It is many years that I would have come to America," he began, "but I have not money till lately. Then I come at once to settle *mon affaire* with Mistare Elliott. He will have forgot, perhaps; but I ever pay what I owe. *Ma foi*, yes—I pay!"

"If it's about business, you might have saved yourself the trouble by calling at the offices in Lanerston. The town is two miles farther back; you must have passed through it or your way here. The manager would have receipted—"



"Oh, I call there first. But it is one debt of honor, and I would see Mistare Elliott only. We Corsicans do not arrange matters like mine with servants. Pah, no! That is not the method of Anton Fieschi!"

And Fieschi, as he called himself, chuckled softly in his throat, a dark shadow falling for a moment across his cadaverous visage. A creepy shiver came over Phil as he noted the ugly look, which, nevertheless, served to quicken his interest in the speaker.

"You come from Corsica?" he put in as Fieschi paused. "That's where they used to have those feuds, isn't it—regular family shindies for revenge? Life must have been exciting there at one time!"

"Ha! the vendetta is not as it was," returned Fieschi, his black eyes kindling. "But it yet breathes—it yet lives—it yet nerves the hand to strike! And why must it not? It is right—it is just. If a man kill your father—shot him dead, pop!—would you let him go free? Even if one says it was self-defense, would you believe that?"

"My father would never injure any man unless it were to protect his own life," cried Phil, catching something of Fieschi's fervor. "No, I wouldn't believe it! I'd—I'd——"

"And if you was young when it happen—young as you are now—would you not recollect it all your days? Would you not dream of the time when you might give back the blow?"

"I should think so—rather," replied Phil valiantly. "Why, if any one hurt my father, I'd risk my neck twenty times over to be even with the fellow—that I would!"

"Bravo—bravo! That is the vendetta—that is the vendetta! If the man flee away, you would search for him over the world. Years might go by, many years, but you would wait and long for *la revanche*. At last you would meet him—ha! and kill him! If he had brothers, you kill them! If children—kill—kill!"

Phil recoiled a step as he glanced at the malevolent features of the man. Was this merely a piece of acting, or was the fellow really possessed by the rage he displayed?

Phil asked himself this question just as they reached the footbridge spanning the railroad, and the probable answer to it rushed into his mind with all the shock of a new and horrible discovery. Dimly he recalled a story he had once heard his father's friends talk about. It was that his father, while on his travels, long years ago, had been attacked by thieves near some lonely village or other, and had only escaped assassination by making effective use of his pistols. Could it be that he had actually killed a man, and that the dead man's son, now grown to manhood, had at length found means to come to the United States intent on vengeance? Was that son Anton Fieschi?

In the middle of the bridge Phil stopped abruptly. His face had turned pale, yet he did not flinch from the task he had set himself.

"Here, I say, what do you want with my father? I refuse to go another step with you, and I shall tell him——"

"Your father!" ejaculated Fieschi. "Mistare Elliott is your father?"

"Certainly he is. My name's Philip Elliott."

The Corsican, with a gleeful cry, suddenly reached out and seized the boy by the collar, bearing him back against the low parapet of the iron structure.

"His son, is it?" he cried savagely. "What was I tell to you? If he have brothers, if he have children—kill—kill!"

Half strangled, Phil strove desperately to free himself. The skates still dangled from his wrists, and, grasping them in his hand, he hurled them with all his force at his assailant's head. The blow was an ill-judged one, serving as it did only to heighten the Corsican's fury.

"You little wolf!" roared he as the headlights of a freight train twinkled through the dusk at a bend in the railroad below them. "You will have no more chance to bite! You over! And down—down!"

Phil's struggles, like his cries for help, were of no avail. Fieschi's muscular arms swung him to the narrow coping of

the bridge, and held him there. The rumble of the oncoming train grew louder; there came a cloud of sulphurous smoke from the engine, a harsh laugh from Fieschi, and Phil felt himself falling—falling, to be torn and mangled among the wheels of the heavy-laden trucks!

\* \* \* \* \*

That day Mr. Elliott had spent at home. He had not been well of late, and really there was no reason why he should exert himself if he did not feel so inclined. The house was connected by telephone with the offices at Lanerston, and should his advice be needed upon any point, nothing could be easier than to ask and obtain it. Toward night, then, just after the lamp had been lighted in the study, the footman entered to announce that a man below wished to speak to his master.

"Who is it, Baxter?" inquired Mr. Elliott. "What name did he give?"

"He said Fisher, sir; but he talks like a furriner. I didn't ask him in."

"Oh, show him into the anteroom. I'll see him as soon as I've finished writing this letter."

But before the letter was wholly written, the whirl of the telephone bell drew Mr. Elliott to the farther end of the room.

"Hello, Dundas; is that you?"

"No, sir. It is I—Inspector Kersley. I want to warn you against a man who, I am informed, intends to present himself and seek an interview with you at your house—a spiteful Corsican named Fieschi."

"Fieschi!" repeated Mr. Elliott, aghast. "It can't be! No, no; of course not." Again speaking into the instrument, he added hurriedly: "What is there to caution me about?"

"The man has been heard to threaten your life, and he has already made a dastardly attempt on that of your son Philip. He threw the lad over the footbridge as a train was passing. Luckily Philip tumbled into the tender behind the engine, and when the train arrived at Lanerston his injuries were found to be very slight."

"Great powers! What an infernal scoundrel!"

Meanwhile Fieschi was impatiently awaiting the appearance of his victim in the room below. He had come to America with his heart bent upon murder, and he meant to work his will even if his own life paid forfeit. He had resolved upon daring and desperate methods which could not—which should not—fail him!

"Hark! He comes at last!" muttered he, a muffled tread sounding in the hall outside.

Drawing a stiletto from his breast, he posted himself on one side of the doorway in readiness to strike. But the footfall echoed along the corridor, gradually dying away in the distance.

With a snarl of disappointment, Fieschi took to pacing the floor agitatedly, the black scowl deepening upon his face. Suddenly he halted and glanced sharply back toward the closed door. A slight creaking noise arose in that quarter. Sliding across the room, the Corsican stealthily seized the doorknob and turned it. The lock had been shot upon him!

Instantly he darted over to the window, whence he espied the footman and the gardener, both armed with stout cudgels, stationed on the lawn beneath. Near them stood the owner of the house, looking intently toward three horsemen, who were rapidly galloping in the direction of the house.

"So that must be he!" cried Fieschi, now thoroughly alive to the fact that his treacherous schemes had somehow come to light. "They think to hold me in a trap. Ho, the fools!"

Thrusting up the window sash, he scrambled out upon the sill and sprang to the ground. With uplifted knife he rushed toward Philip's father, who in all likelihood would have fared badly had not the gardener with a deft lunge of his cudgel struck the weapon out of the Corsican's grasp. All three immediately flung themselves upon him, his frenzied struggles only ceasing when the police officers, dashing up, snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.



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